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BILATERAL RELATIONS

INDIA - JAPAN

INTRODUCTION

India–Japan relations have traditionally been strong. The people of India and Japan have engaged in cultural exchanges, primarily as a result of Buddhism, which spread indirectly from India to Japan via China and Korea. The people of India and Japan are guided by common cultural traditions including the shared heritage of Buddhism and share a strong commitment to the ideals of democracy, tolerance, pluralism, and open societies. India and Japan, two of the largest and oldest democracies in Asia, having a high degree of congruence of political, economic, and strategic interests, view each other as partners that have responsibility for, and are capable of, responding to global and regional challenges. India is the largest recipient of Japanese aid and both countries have a special relationship official development assistance (ODA).

Japanese companies, such as Yamaha, Sony, Toyota, and Honda have manufacturing facilities in India. With the growth of the Indian economy, India is a big market for Japanese firms. Japanese firms were some of the first firms to invest in India. The most prominent Japanese company to have an investment in India is automobiles multinational Suzuki, which is in partnership with Indian automobiles company Maruti Suzuki, the largest car manufacturer in the Indian market, and a subsidiary of the Japanese company.

In December 2006, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan culminated in the signing of the "Joint Statement towards Japan-India Strategic and Global Partnership". Japan has helped finance many infrastructure projects in India, most notably the Delhi Metro system. Indian applicants were welcomed in 2006 to the JET Programme, with one slot available in 2006 and increasing to 41 slots in 2007. In 2007, the Japanese Self-Defence Forces and the Indian Navy took part in a joint naval exercise Malabar 2007 in the Indian Ocean, which also involved the naval forces of Australia, Singapore and the United States. 2007 was declared "India-Japan Friendship Year."

According to a 2013 BBC World Service Poll, 42% Japanese think India's international impact is mainly positive, with 4% considering it negative.

HISTORICAL RELATIONS

Prehistoric contacts

Yayoi tombs have yielded hundreds and in some cases thousands of Indo-pacific tube drawn glass beads originating from India and South East Asia dating from Early Yayoi (300-200 BCE), middle Yayoi (200-0 BCE) and late Yayoi (0-250 CE) indicating existence of Indian Ocean maritime contacts between Japan and South and South East Asia.

Historic contacts

India's earliest documented direct contact with Japan was with the Todai-ji Temple in Nara, where the consecration or eye-opening of the towering statue of Lord Buddha was performed by an Indian monk, Bodhisena, in 752 AD.

Hinduism in Japan

In my opinion, if all our rich and educated men once go and see Japan, their eyes will be opened.
— Swami Vivekananda, The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 5/Conversations and Dialogues/VI – X Shri Priya Nath Sinha.

Though Hinduism is a little-practiced religion in Japan, it has still had a significant, but indirect role in the formation of Japanese culture. This is mostly because many Buddhist beliefs and traditions (which share a common Dharmic root with Hinduism) spread to Japan from China via the Korean peninsula in the 6th Century. One indication of this is the Japanese "Seven Gods of Fortune", of which four originated as Hindu deities: Benzaitensama (Sarasvati), Bishamon (Vaiśravaṇa or Kubera), Daikokuten (Mahākāla/Shiva), and Kichijōten (Lakshmi).

The Hindu Ganesha (see Kangiten) is displayed more than Buddha in a temple in Futako Tamagawa, Tokyo. Other examples of Hindu influence on Japan include the belief of "six schools" or "six doctrines" as well as use of Yoga and pagodas. Many of the facets of Hindu culture which have influenced Japan have also influenced Chinese culture. People have written books on the worship of Hindu gods in Japan. Even today, it is claimed Japan encourages a deeper study of Hindu gods.

BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

Buddhism has been practiced in Japan since its official introduction in 552 CE according to the Nihon Shoki from Baekje, Korea by Buddhist monks.Although some Chinese sources place the first spreading of the religion earlier during the Kofun period (250 to 538). Buddhism has had a major influence on the development of Japanese society and remains an influential aspect of the culture to this day.

Cultural exchanges between India and Japan began early in the 6th century with the introduction of Buddhism to Japan from India. The Indian monk Bodhisena arrived in Japan in 736 to spread Buddhism and performed eye-opening of the Great Buddha built-in Tōdai-ji, and would remain in Japan until his death in 760. Buddhism and the intrinsically linked Indian culture had a great impact on Japanese culture, still felt today, and resulted in a natural sense of amiability between the two nations.

As a result of the link of Buddhism between India and Japan, monks and scholars often embarked on voyages between the two nations. Ancient records from the now-destroyed library at Nalanda University in India describe scholars and pupils who attended the school from Japan. One of the most famous Japanese travellers to the Indian subcontinent was Tenjiku Tokubei (1612–1692), named after Tenjiku ("Heavenly Abode"), the Japanese name for India.

The cultural exchanges between the two countries created many parallels in their folklore. Modern popular culture based upon this folklore, such as works of fantasy fiction in manga and anime, sometimes bear references to common deities (deva), demons (asura) and philosophical concepts.

Relations between the two nations have continued since then, but direct political exchange began only in the Meiji era (1868–1912), when Japan embarked on the process of modernisation. Japan-India Association was founded in 1903. Further cultural exchange occurred during the mid-late 20th century through Asian cinema, with Indian cinema and Japanese cinema both experiencing a "golden age" during the 1950s and 1960s. Indian films by Satyajit Ray, Guru Dutt were influential in Japan, while Japanese films by Akira Kurosawa, Yasujirō Ozu and Takashi Shimizu have likewise been influential in India.

INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Suresh Chandra Bandopadhyay, Manmatha Nath Ghosh and Hariprobha Takeda were among the earliest Indians who visited Japan and wrote on their experiences there. Correspondences between distinguished individuals from both nations had a noticeable increase in volume during this period; historical documents show a friendship between Japanese thinker Okakura Tenshin and Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore, Okakura Tenshin and Bengali poet Priyamvada Devi. Govindrao N. Potdar established an organization called the Indo-Japanese Association in 1904 with the help of a Japanese friend Mr. Sakurai, which was dedicated for helping the Indian expatriates migrating to Japan.

As India was then a British colony, Indo-Japanese relations were boosted by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. However, other emerging movements would strengthen relations between the two nations. Pan-Asian ideals and the Indian independence movement saw India and Japan grow closer, reaching their apogee during the Second World War. Relations between Britain and Japan had started to deteriorate since the end of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on 17 August 1923 due to American pressure. Many Indian independence activists escaped to Japan, including activist Rash Behari Bose which furthered Indo-Japanese relations. Future Japanese prime minister Tsuyoshi Inukai, pan-Asianist Mitsuru Tōyama and other Japanese individuals supported the Indian independence movement.

Before World War II

- In 1934, the "Indo-Japanese Trade Agreement of 1934" was signed in Delhi on 5 January 1934 and went effective on 12 July 1934.

- In 1937, the "Indo-Japanese Trade Agreement of 1937" went effective on 1 April 1937, for three years, until 31 March 1940.

During World War II

Since India was a British colony when the Second World War broke out, it was deemed to have entered the war on the side of the Allies. Over 2 million Indians participated in the war; many served in combat against the Japanese who briefly occupied British Burma and reached the Indian border. Some 67,000 Indian soldiers were captured by the Japanese when Singapore surrendered in 1942, many of whom later became part of the Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army (INA). In 1944–45, combined British and Indian forces defeated the Japanese in a series of battles in Burma and the INA disintegrated.

INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

Subhas Chandra Bose, who led the Azad Hind, a nationalist movement which aimed to end British rule in India through military means, used Japanese sponsorship to form the Azad Hind Fauj or Indian National Army (INA). The INA was composed mainly of former prisoners of war from the Indian Army who had been captured by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore. They joined primarily because of the very harsh, often fatal conditions in Japanese POW camps.

The INA also recruited volunteers from Indian expatriates in Southeast Asia. Bose was eager for the INA to participate in any invasion of India and persuaded several Japanese that a victory such as Mutaguchi anticipated would lead to the collapse of British rule in India. The idea that their western boundary would be controlled by a more friendly government was attractive to the Japanese. Japan never expected India to be part of its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The Japanese government built, supported, and controlled the Indian National Army and the Indian Independence League. Japanese forces included INA units in many battles, most notably at the U Go Offensive at Manipur. The offensive culminated in the Battles of Imphal and Kohima where the Japanese forces were pushed back and the INA lost cohesion.



MODERN RELATIONS

At the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal became famous for his dissenting judgment in favor of Japan. The judgment of Justice Radhabinod Pal is remembered even today in Japan. This became a symbol of the close ties between India and Japan.

On 15 August 1947, Japan was among the first nations to recognize Indian sovereignty after its independence from the United Kingdom. A relatively well-known result of the two nations' was in 1949, when India sent the Tokyo Zoo two elephants to cheer the spirits of the defeated Japanese empire.

In India, there was great admiration for Japan's post-war economic reconstruction and subsequent rapid growth.

In 2014, the Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Japan. During his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi had maintained good ties with the Japanese PM Shinzo Abe. His 2014 visit further strengthened the ties between the two countries, and resulted in several key agreements, including the establishment of a "Special Strategic Global Partnership".

Modi visited Japan for the second time as Prime Minister in November 2016. During the meeting, India and Japan signed the "Agreement for Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy", a landmark civil nuclear agreement, under which Japan will supply nuclear reactors, fuel, and technology to India. India is not a signatory to the non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is the only non-signatory to receive an exemption from Japan. The two sides also signed agreements on manufacturing skill development in India, cooperation in space, earth sciences, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, transport and urban development.

Yogendra Puranik, popularly known as Yogi, became the first elected India-born City Councillor in Japan, to represent the City Council of Edogawa City in Tokyo. His victory was well received by the mass public and media, not just in India and Japan but across the globe including China.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Eonomic and commercial cooperation forms a central pillar of the India–Japan relationship. The institutional foundation for modern ties was laid in August 2000 during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to India, when both nations established the "Japan–India Global Partnership in the 21st Century." This momentum continued with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Japan in December 2001, resulting in the "Japan–India Joint Declaration," and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's April 2005 visit, which added a strategic orientation to the global partnership.

A major breakthrough in bilateral trade occurred with the implementation of the India–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in August 2011, which eliminated tariffs on over 90% of traded goods. Bilateral trade has grown steadily, reaching US$ 27.47 billion in FY 2025–26. During this period, India's imports from Japan stood at US$ 21.43 billion—making Japan India's 10th largest import partner—while India's exports to Japan reached US$ 6.04 billion.

Japan is one of India's most reliable investment partners and its 5th largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Between April 2000 and March 2026, cumulative Japanese FDI into India totaled US$ 48.14 billion, representing nearly 6.7% of India's total FDI inflows. Nearly 1,500 Japanese companies operate in India across sectors such as automobiles, electrical equipment, telecommunications, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and financial services. Following the achievement of earlier investment targets—including the JPY 5 trillion target set for 2022–2027—both countries adopted the India–Japan Joint Vision for the Next Decade (2025–2035), setting an ambitious target to mobilize JPY 10 trillion in Japanese private investment into India over ten years.
Japan is also India's largest bilateral development partner through its Official Development Assistance (ODA). Key flagship infrastructure projects backed by low-interest Japanese ODA loans include:

- Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) & Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC): Initiated following the October 2008 agreement with an initial US$ 4.5 billion loan commitment to transform industrial and rail connectivity between Delhi and Mumbai.
- Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR): Signed in December 2015, India's first bullet train corridor utilizes Japan's Shinkansen technology, with over 80% of the estimated US$ 19 billion project cost funded by a concessional 0.1% interest-rate loan from Japan.

Entering 2027, bilateral economic cooperation has expanded beyond traditional infrastructure into resilient supply chains and emerging technologies. Under the India–Japan Economic Security Initiative (launched in 2025) and the Industrial Competitiveness Partnership, both countries are deepening collaboration in semiconductors, critical minerals, clean energy, artificial intelligence, and digital infrastructure.

MILITARY RELATIONS

India and Japan also have close military ties. They have shared interests in maintaining the security of sea-lanes in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean, and in co-operation for fighting international crime, terrorism, piracy and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The two nations have frequently held joint military exercises and co-operate on technology. India and Japan concluded a security pact on 22 October 2008.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is seen by some to be an "Indophile" and, with rising tensions in territorial disputes with Japan's neighbors, has advocated closer security cooperation with India.

In July 2014, the Indian Navy participated in Exercise Malabar with the Japanese and US navies, reflecting shared perspectives on Indo-Pacific maritime security. India is also negotiating to purchase US-2 amphibious aircraft for the Indian Navy.



CULTURAL RELATIONS

Japan and India have strong cultural ties, based mainly on Japanese Buddhism, which remains widely practiced through Japan even today. The two nations announced 2007, the 50th anniversary year of the Indo-Japan Cultural Agreement, as the Indo-Japan Friendship and Tourism-Promotion Year, holding cultural events in both the countries. One such cultural event is the annual Namaste India Festival, which started in Japan over twenty years ago and is now the largest festival of its kind in the world. At the 2016 festival, representatives from Onagawa town performed, as a sign of appreciation for the support the town received from the Indian Government during the Great East Japan Earthquake. The Indian National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team had been dispatched in Onagawa for its first overseas mission and conducted search and rescue operations for missing people.

India and Japan also have a strong relationship through Japanese Animes. There are many Japanese Animes which are aired in India which is dubbed in Hindi language and is also very popular. In February 2005, Doraemon became the 1st Anime to be introduced in India which is also aired presently in Disney Channel and Hungama TV. And also Doraemon is considered as most popular Kids show as well as Best in India. More than 30 Hindi Dubbed movies are telecasted till the Date of the Doraemon Series, making it the most number of Movies from a particular Anime series to be Aired in India. Other Popular Animes in India include Pokemon Series, Crayon Shin-Chan, Dragon Ball, Ninja Hattori, etc. Also many Anime movies are released in Indian theatres.

Tamil movies are very popular in Japan and Rajnikanth is the most popular Indian star in this country.Bollywood has become more popular among the Japanese people in recent decades, and the Indian yogi and pacifist Dhalsim is one of the most popular characters in the Japanese video game series Street Fighter.

Starting 3 July 2014, Japan has been issuing multiple entry visas for the short term stay of Indian nationals.

2016 NUCLEAR DEAL

Civil nuclear energy cooperation is a landmark pillar of the India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership. On 11 November 2016, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tokyo, India and Japan signed the Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy alongside Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Following ratification by Japan's Diet, the accord entered into force on 20 July 2017.

Concluded after six years of negotiations—delayed in part by safety sensitivities following the 2011 Fukushima disaster—the pact marked a historic diplomatic shift. It was the first time Japan signed a civil nuclear agreement with a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). All cooperation under the accord is strictly for peaceful purposes, governed by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and linked to India's unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.

The agreement authorizes Japan to supply nuclear reactors, fuel, and technology to India. Crucially, it also unlocks third-party nuclear projects—including plans for six reactors in southern India—because major US and French reactor builders rely on Japanese firms for critical components like reactor pressure vessels.

While initial commercial rollouts faced delays over supplier liability rules, India's enactment of the SHANTI Act in December 2025 rationalized vendor liability and opened the sector to private and foreign participation. With India targeting 22.38 GW of nuclear capacity by 2031–32 and 100 GW by 2047, Japan remains a key partner in India's clean energy transition.



DEVELOPMENT

In August 2017, the two countries announced the establishment of the Japan-India Coordination Forum (JICF) for Development of the North-Eastern Region, described by India as "a coordination forum to identify priority development areas of cooperation for development" of northeast India. The forum will focus on strategic projects aimed at improving connectivity, roads, electric infrastructure, food processing, disaster management, and promoting organic farming and tourism in northeast India. A Japanese embassy spokesperson stated that the development of the northeast was a "priority" for India and its Act East Policy and that Japan placed a "special emphasis on cooperation in North East for its geographical importance connecting India to South-East Asia and historical ties".[61] The forum held its first meeting on 3 August 2017.



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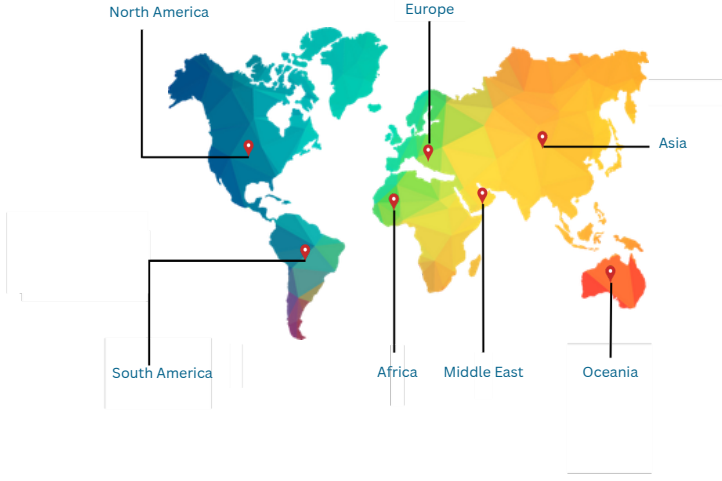

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