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## From Buddha to Bose: exploring 19th-20th century India-Japan relations

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### Abstract

The arrival of Buddhism in Japan, catalyzed by the transmission of Buddhist artifacts from India, symbolizes the deep historical ties between the two civilizations. The initial acceptance of Buddhism by the Soga clan of Japan contrasted with the resistance from adherents of Shinto reflects the dynamics of cultural diffusion and preservation within Japan.

Moving forward to the 19th century, the re-establishment of direct contacts between India and Japan marks a significant phase in bilateral relations. Figures such as P.C. Mozoomdar, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore played pivotal roles in fostering mutual understanding and intellectual exchange during this period. Their travels and interactions not only enriched Japan's cultural landscape but also facilitated a broader dialogue on spirituality, philosophy, and the quest for independence. The involvement of individuals like Rash Behari Bose and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose further deepened the bond, aligning India and Japan in shared struggles for national liberation. These connections underscore a history of solidarity and collaboration that transcended geographical boundaries.

In general, the relationship between Japan and India is an outstanding example of the sustainable legacy of mutual cooperation, intellectual exchange, and cultural exchange. The shared ideals, respect for one another, and dedication to creating a better future together have always been the defining characteristics of the relationship between the two nations, from the spread of Buddhism to the current era of diplomatic relations. India and Japan are well-positioned to strengthen their alliance and advance world peace, prosperity, and advancement as they negotiate the challenges of the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** India-Japan relation, culture, religion, freedom movement, INA

### Introduction

Over centuries, there was a notable evolution in the relationship between India and Japan. Japan and India have had a closer relationship thanks to cultural exchanges and, in particular, the Indian Freedom Movement in the twentieth century. The origins of the historical connections between these two countries date back to the sixth century CE, when Buddhism was brought to Japan through China and Korea. Prince Shotoku Taishi (574-622), one of the most important figures in Japanese history, played a key role in promoting Buddhism and its spread across the nation. Buddhism's teachings have had a profound impact on Japanese philosophy, art, architecture, and culture, and Shotoku Taishi's support contributed to Buddhism's rise to prominence as a major religion in Japan during his rule.

He endorsed a culture of respect for Buddhist texts and supported in expanding awareness of Buddhist teachings by encouraging the nobles to transcribe sutras. The Seventeen-Article Constitution, which formed moral and ethical principles for the government based on Buddhist perceptions, was attributed to Prince Shotoku in 604 CE. This constitution focused an extreme priority on principles like harmony, kindness, and the value of ethical governance.

Furthermore, he promoted the study of Buddhist texts and philosophy, which enhanced Japan's cultural background. By all of these associations, he permitted the exchange of Buddhist scriptures, relics, and spiritual practices, thereby increasing Japan's understanding and implementation of Buddhism. Frequently referred to as the "Father of Japanese Buddhism," he is considered one of the most important figures in Japanese history.

The Japanese Edo period (1603-1868) was marked by a strategy of national isolation known as Sakoku (鎖国), or "closed country."

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Following this time of seclusion, Japan opened up to the outside world in the middle of the 19th century, which had a profound impact on both Japanese foreign policy and society. At this point in time, Japan was under the leadership of the Tokugawa shogunate, which isolated the country from outside influences in an effort to consolidate political power and preserve internal hierarchies and status quo. Foreign trade and contact were severely restricted by Sakoku's administration. Except for a limited number of Dutch and Chinese traders, foreigners were generally banned from entering Japan. Under the threat of war, Japanese nationals were also prohibited from traveling overseas. Only permitted ports, especially Nagasaki, which hosted limited trade with Dutch and Chinese traders, had been utilized for foreign trade. The shogunate closely monitored and managed these commerce exchanges.

Intellectual and cultural spheres were also included in the isolationist stance. Foreign ideas and books were banned and information coming from outside Japan was closely monitored. However, there was a significant cultural blossoming in Japan, as seen by the advancement of literature, theatre, and traditional arts. When American Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in 1853 with a fleet of warships, he insisted that Japan open up to world trade. The Perry Expedition was an event that initiated pressure on Japan to end its isolation. *The Treaty of Kanagawa*, which Japan and the United States signed in 1854, established diplomatic relations and allowing American ships to make use of two ports.

Similar agreements with other countries in the West were made in response to this one, that helped Japan slowly open up to international economic and diplomatic relations. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was the result of larger social and political transformations sparked by Japan's openness. The Tokugawa shogunate came to an end during this time, and Japan started to quickly westernize and become a so-called modern nation-state.

### **Unity in diversity: Exploring the bonds between cultures and faiths**

Japan experienced significant historical change during the Meiji era (1868–1912), which was defined by modernization, industrialization, and the establishment of new diplomatic ties with different countries, especially India. India and Japan possessed a rise in encounters and exchanges during this time, which set the groundwork for their future bilateral relations.

However, P. C. Mozoomdar's travel to Japan in 1882 to deliver lectures on the development of Brahma faith paved the way for Bengali travellers gaining first-hand experience of Japan as students and tourists. P. C. Mozoomdar also participated in the 1893 Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions. The Parliament of the World's Religions provides an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and exchange of thoughts, which may have produced unprecedented consequences on the manner in which 'spiritual' individuals from different backgrounds perceive and communicate with each other.

Vivekananda's speech on Hinduism made a significant impact on the audience and indirectly influenced the spreading of Hindu spirituality and philosophy to many corners of the world, which also included Japan. His works of literature have been translated into Japanese, and Japanese scholars who were looking into alternative

spiritual approaches were impacted by his ideas on yoga and Vedanta. A few Japanese academics and intellectuals who had been attracted by Vivekananda's teachings corresponded with him. Notable among them was the Japanese scholar Professor G. Nakamura, who contributed in the popularization of Vivekananda's teachings in Japan by translating his works into Japanese. Ultimately, despite the fact that Swami Vivekananda had limited direct contacts with Japan, his philosophy and teachings had a significant worldwide influence and influenced a part of Japan's intellectual and spiritual environment in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Rabindranath Tagore had an extensive number of friendships and connections with Japan as well. Japanese intellectuals greatly appreciated Tagore's poetry which had been translated into Japanese and extensively read. His works touched a deep impact with the Japanese the public eye and were praised for their spiritual insights, lyrical beauty, and universal themes. Several well-known Japanese people, including intellectuals and cultural leaders, were personal friends of Tagore's. Notably, he was connected to the Japanese scholar and diplomat Nitobe Inazō, who was influential in bringing Tagore to Japanese audiences by translating his works into Japanese. His focus on creativity, cross-cultural learning, and holistic education had an impact on Japanese educators during the Meiji and Taishō periods, while they were advocating for innovative educational reforms. India and Japan grew closer as a result of Tagore's important cultural tours to Japan in 1916 and 1924. In spite of initial apprehension on the behalf of his Japanese audience towards Tagore's timely addressal of Japan's inclination towards hyper-nationalism in his famous *Nationalism* lectures delivered in Japan in 1916, he is still held in high regard in both India and Japan.

### **Warriors of liberation: Indian freedom fighters' quest for independence from Japanese soil**

On May 25, 1886, in the Purba Bardhaman district of Bengal province in British India, Rash Behari Bose was born in Subaldaha village (which is currently in West Bengal, India). He received education in a Subaldaha rural school throughout his early years. He later completed his high school education in Guskara. Since his early youth, Bose was engaged in the Indian independence movement. Nationalist figures such as Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal had an influence on him. At the age of 22, Bose took part in acts of resistance and protest against British rule. Bose became a part of the Anushilan Samiti, a revolutionary group that endorsed political activism and armed resistance to British colonial power. He began to interact with renowned organization leaders and took part in covert operations intended to topple British rule in India. However, he was being monitored by the British authorities because of his participation in revolutionary activities. He was charged with involvement in the bombing of the British Viceroy's march in Delhi in 1912. Bose went into hiding in order to avoid being detained and persecuted. In 1915, he finally made his way to Japan, where he sought safety and carried on with his anti-colonial activities.

Bose persisted in his revolutionary operations in Japan with the goal of liberating India from British domination. He established contacts with military officials, academics, and politicians in Japan who supported Asian nationalism and anti-colonialism. Bose's political views were consistent with

Pan-Asianism, which encouraged collaboration and solidarity among Asian countries in opposition to Western imperialism. He saw Japan as a potential ally in India's Independence movement and enlisted the help of Japanese authorities to further the cause.

In order to increase understanding with the Japanese government and raise support for India's independence movement among Indians residing in Southeast Asia, Rash Behari Bose formed the Indian Independence League (IIL) in Tokyo in 1942. Bose was significant in helping the Japanese government build the Indian National Army (INA), commonly referred to as the Azad Hind Fauj. The INA was aimed at liberating India from British rule by armed resistance and was made up of expatriates and Indian prisoners of war. Subhas Chandra Bose, another well-known Indian nationalist leader was a close collaborator of Rash Behari Bose. They came together to create plans for military operations against British forces in Southeast Asia and to organize support for the INA.

Subhas Chandra Bose, popularly known as Netaji, was born on January 23, 1897, in Cuttack, Orissa, India. His family was a well-known Bengali family. His father, Janakinath Bose, was a successful lawyer and advocate, while his mother, Prabhavati Devi, came from a family known for their engagement in social and political issues. Bose had his early education at the Protestant European School in Cuttack. He attended the prestigious Ravenshaw Collegiate School before continuing his education at Presidency College in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Bose was renowned for his extraordinary academic accomplishments and his love of literature, history, and political theory. Bose's engagement in the Indian nationalist activities intensified during his time in college. Swami Vivekananda's teachings, nationalism, independence, and social reform all had a profound impact on him. Bose took part in a number of anti-British colonial marches and demonstrations after joining the Indian National Congress (INC). Bose was successful in passing the Indian Civil Service (ICS) exam in 1920, but he resigned from the prestigious position in resistance towards oppressive British policies in India. He demonstrated his dedication to the cause of India's independence and his desire to work toward the betterment of his fellow citizens by choosing to forgo a career in the civil service with the certainty of security and opulence. Bose became known as the INC's vibrant and captivating leader. He headed over the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee after holding the position of president of the All India Youth Congress. Bose's organizational abilities and leadership approach won him the respect and allegiance of Indian nationalists. Bose's political views changed as time passed on. Bose first supported the moderate wing of the INC under Mahatma Gandhi, but he soon lost faith in the strategy of nonviolence and started pushing for more extreme and violent means of achieving India's independence. The association between Subhas Chandra Bose with the Indian National Army (INA) represents an important turning point in both his personal and nationalist journey. During his exile in Germany and then in Southeast Asia, Subhas Chandra Bose realized that a military force could be formed to combat British colonial control in India. He founded the Indian National Army (INA), popularly known as the Azad Hind Fauj, in 1942 with assistance from the Japanese. At first, the INA was made up of Indian volunteers and expatriates who were residing in Southeast Asian nations, as well as Indian

prisoners of war who had been taken prisoner by Japanese forces in that region. Recruits for the INA came from all over India, with a shared goal of independence bringing them together. The Indian National Army (INA) led by Bose fought the British in Southeast Asia, especially in Burma (now Myanmar) and the north-eastern frontiers of India. The INA was heavily involved in a number of engagements and fought alongside Japanese forces. The Battle of Imphal and Kohima in 1944, in which INA soldiers fought with Japanese forces against the British Indian Army, was one of the INA's most prominent campaigns. The conflict is still remembered as a pivotal moment in Indian military history, despite the INA's difficulties and eventual failure to accomplish its goals.

Broadcasts and messages were utilized by Subhas Chandra Bose to inspire the INA and encourage Indian soldiers to take up the cause of independence. His talks and messages, which were aired on Radio Tokyo, inspired Indian listeners both inside and outside of the country to support the INA's objectives. India was not immediately liberated as a result of the INA's military efforts, but its creation and actions had a significant influence on the country's independence movement. The INA stood for the solidarity and unwavering will of Indians from all backgrounds to fight for their independence. In India, the INA's and Subhas Chandra Bose's efforts are honoured as essential components of the nation's freedom struggle.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of India-Japan relations in the 19th century demonstrates a deep and intricate relationship based on literary exchange, cultural interchange, and through collaborations for Indian struggle for freedom. From the Asuka period, when Buddhism was transmitted to Japan, to the 19th century, when direct communication was restored between the two countries on their path to 'modernisation', India and Japan have had a dynamic and changing relationship that has influenced their own histories and identities. The spread of Buddhism from India to Japan emphasizes the two civilizations' shared spiritual traditions and represents the long-standing historical linkages between nations.

The restoration of direct communication between India and Japan in the 19th century marked the beginning of a new era in mutual relations marked by intellectual interchange, and cultural enrichment. Individuals hailing from different backgrounds, and different agendas from both India and Japan were influential in promoting friendship and collaboration between the two nations, overcoming distance to achieve shared objectives.

One significant chapter in the shared history of both nations is the 20th-century engagement of Indian freedom fighters in Japan. In the struggle against British rule over India, Rash Behari Bose, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and other leaders formed alliances and worked along with Japanese authorities. Their actions not only strengthened the relationship between Japan and India but also demonstrated the global solidarity in the fight for freedom and self-determination. Their legacy today paves the ground for ongoing collaboration and partnership in the modern day.

The future of Indo-Japan relations promises increased economic cooperation, strategic alliances, and technical collaboration, building on centuries of common values and cultural interaction. Both nations are well-positioned to

improve people-to-people and cultural exchanges because of their shared regard for one another and dedication to preserving global stability. India and Japan will continue to collaborate as responsible global citizens to address shared issues and shape the Indo-Pacific region's future. Having a strong historical basis, Indo-Japanese ties have a great deal of promise for future growth and prosperity in a world that is changing drastically.

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