



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

**Japanese Language -
the cornerstone of
Japan-India
bilateral relations**

by

**Geethanjali Rajan
Suguna Ramamoorthy**



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

**Japanese Language -
the cornerstone of
Japan-India
bilateral relations**

by

Geethanjali Rajan

Suguna Ramamoorthy

PREFACE

The Japanese Language School of Indo-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IJCCI) was inaugurated on the same day as the establishment of IJCCI in 1989. We, in the Chamber consider that Japanese language and culture are the two eyes for doing business with Japan. This Resource Paper on “Japanese Language—the Cornerstone of Japan-India Bilateral Relations” examines the importance of Japanese language in the context of steadily growing economic relations between the two countries.

The authors of the Resource Paper are Ms. Geethanjali Rajan, a senior teacher of IJCCI Language School and Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy, Secretary-General of IJCCI. Ms. Geethanjali Rajan who has shown promise even as a student in our School, is one of our senior teachers, with a lot of commitment, interest and passion for the Japanese language. She has undergone a Japanese Language Teachers Training Programme recently at Urawa, Japan, courtesy the Japan Foundation. Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy has also visited Japan through the Japan Foundation and is involved with the School and the Chamber almost from the beginning. Their rich experience finds expression in this small booklet.

With my experience of working with Japan closely in several fields for fifty years, I feel that this small book is stimulating and thought-provoking. I hope the readers will find the book interesting and useful.

February 2016

N. Krishnaswami
Chairman

Japanese Language - the cornerstone of Japan-India bilateral relations

India-Japan relations has assumed great momentum in recent times, especially after the Modi-Abe camaraderie. Japan depends on India as much as India depends on Japan, or even more. The cooperation between India and Japan from time immemorial, now extends to a host of activities - economic, social, strategic, security besides education and culture.

The growth of the two economies will be a boon to the Asian sub-continent. While diplomats, scholars and statesmen in both countries endorse this sentiment, why is it that a revolution in India-Japan relations is not happening? A lack of proper understanding of Japanese language and culture could be a reason for this. It is in this context that the Language School of Indo-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry thought it fit to explore the language aspect and how the gap could be bridged.

With the advent of Japanese collaborations like Maruti Suzuki, India witnessed a surge in the number of people interested in learning Japanese. This was the situation nearly two or three

decades ago. But Japanese language was still far away from being the choice of a foreign language to learn. If we look at the recent scenario, in 2015 the number of Indian companies doing business with Japan has increased many fold. A large number of Japanese companies have set up offices in different parts of India. The fact that Japan has taken a great interest in developing business corridors and infrastructure projects in India, has led to many people desiring to learn Japanese with an idea of business interactions or to find employment with Japanese companies. This in turn has kindled the interest of engineering colleges, and their students wanting to learn Japanese and look at it as a foreign language option.

Japanese language learning today - a few facts

In the backdrop of increasing economic and cultural interaction between the two countries, and India's commitment to strengthen relations with Japan, let us look at the facts related to Japanese language education presently in India.

- The very first Japanese language courses in India were started as early as the 1950s.
- There are universities, even if they are dismally few in number, which offer undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes in Japanese.
- Some universities have a dedicated department for Japanese language and culture studies.

- The number of candidates taking the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT- *nihongo noushoku shiken*) has grown exponentially in the last decade in India.
- There has been a great increase in the number of private institutes and language schools teaching Japanese in many parts of India in the last ten years.
- Many colleges, especially for engineering undergraduate courses, now offer a semester of Japanese as an optional language, where previously the choice was French or German.
- Japanese is offered as an elective language in some schools where students have been learning it in place of third language or as an optional foreign language.

The Japan Foundation

Japan Foundation, a quasi-government organisation (recently privatised) dedicated to the promotion of Japanese language, art and culture all over the world, has contributed a great deal to this objective. To mention a few of its activities:

- Offering scholarship programmes for under graduate / post graduate programmes in Japanese universities for foreign students.
- Training in Japanese language and culture by native Japanese language teachers to language teachers across the globe.

- Offer short duration Japanese language programmes in Japan to foreign Japanese language teachers.
- Provision of Japanese language teaching materials.
- Library Support programme.
- Exchange of scholars.
- Exchange of foreign students & youths.
- Sending teams of Japanese cultural / martial artistes to different countries.
- Inviting artistes from other countries to Japan.
- Conducting Japanese language proficiency tests - JLPT exams (to measure Japanese language proficiency of foreign students) and awarding of certificates.
- Promoting and funding Japanese language speech contests in different countries - regional and national.

These are some of the good activities of the Japan Foundation. By introducing programmes of this kind, a great number of people - students and elders not only developed interest in Japan and Japanese culture but also gained Japanese language knowledge.

Today, thousands of students in India (irrespective of age and gender) actively take up JLPT exams from level 5 to Level 1. Initially in India the JLPT exam was an annual affair, later it became half-yearly. There has been a steady increase in the number of students opting for JLPT exams as multinational

companies started showing importance and value to the JLPT certificate holders of higher Levels of proficiency. The goal of students appears to be to learn a few hundred kanjis in a few months, some basic grammar and answering the audio tape of conversation of native speakers, all of objective pattern. This exercise is being achieved very well by many students. Private colleges and language schools also insist on the JLPT as a yardstick for recruitment of teachers.

Points to ponder

A tendency to depend too much on clearing JLPT exams and not fully comprehending the fundamental goal of language learning results in an inability to communicate in Japanese with the native Japanese. In recent years, many voices of dissent have arisen from academics within Japan as well as abroad, as the JLPT is more a test of understanding than expressing in Japanese language. It does not require any amount of speaking or writing to be done. While it is a test that can certify one's level of understanding Japanese, it does not take into cognisance the expressive aspect of language. In any language learning, especially in the study of foreign language the communicative abilities are to be encouraged and certified. Multinational companies who recruit people for Japanese skills rely on this certification, probably due to the lack of any other alternative. As a result, students too want to write the JLPT and be certified as proficient in Japanese language, all the time not really thinking of actual communication in Japanese as a goal ! This has led to a downward spiral with many of the so-called Japanese

Language Centres considering test-taking as a strategy, rather than learning the language.

Recognising these facts, Japanese academics and the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute at Urawa and Kansai have emphasised the model of communication- based language education. This model is based on the ability of actual, practical and necessary communication in Japanese emphasising the “can-do” model and the need for a cultural paradigm to Japanese language learning. If the goal is to learn Japanese and speak or write in the language, keeping in mind the culture of its people, the listener as well as the speaker, we have to take a re-look at the structure and approach to language learning. For the present, it is extremely important to keep sight of the ultimate goal of Japanese language learning - “communication” and teach the language with a firm view of achieving the goal. Tests aside, communicative ability should be the focus of the course and not merely achieving a particular level.

Opening the doors for new programmes and ideas:

The number of colleges and universities offering a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate programme in Japanese still remains a handful or less. More than sixty years into diplomatic ties with Japan and an expectation of booming economic cooperation, must galvanise more universities to offer opportunities for young Indians to study Japanese full-time. Delhi has always been a hub of Japanese teaching because of the full-time University programmes in Japanese.

Some colleges and Japanese language teaching institutions could be identified in different cities in India to offer undergraduate / post-graduate programmes in Japanese language. Also, starting of Part-time Diploma programmes - one year / two years (relatively less duration) by institutions dedicated to promote Japan-India relations would be an ideal strategy for training young graduates whose talents can be exploited by multinational companies in India. Also, sector-specific specialised Japanese language Diploma Courses (part-time) by native Japanese in select fields such as tourism / medical / manufacturing / IT / legal / Accounts & audit etc. can be offered to educated men and women in their 40s and 50s through the good offices of the Japan Foundation to interested students. Instead of hiring interpreters and translators, the readily available knowledge pool can be tapped by multinational companies for their requirements from time to time. The sector-specific programmes can also be entrusted with organisations intensively involved in promoting India-Japan relations. These organisations can be tagged on with local Japanese industries for on job exposure in order to achieve a higher level of competency. To be precise, Japanese private universities / management institutions can draw a Model Certificate Programme accepted by multinational companies across the globe.

Today's learner profile:

The student profile in the Japanese language classroom has changed much since the early days. From the learner who wanted

to learn a foreign language to broaden perspective, the profile has changed to one where the learner wants to translate or interpret or even learn the language well enough to teach it. It is heartening to note that educated men and women in their 40s and 50s who carry with them a great deal of maturity and experience show a lot of interest these days in learning Japanese language.

Some handicaps and possible solutions:

Ever since the Japan Foundation was privatised, there is a real dearth in the availability of Japanese textbooks, audio visual materials etc. The study materials are still quite difficult to source in India at a reasonable cost. Hence, many institutions look at using the already tried, tested and widely available older texts. More textbooks from India, based on the Indian ethos may be an area worth exploring by the Japan Foundation. A paucity of native language teachers is also a handicap to many teaching institutions. With the rise in demand for Japanese language learning and the growing dearth of Japanese language teachers and this skewed ratio has to be corrected, if we should move in the right direction. The Japan Foundation, dedicated to the promotion of Japanese language and culture could identify and encourage retired language teachers from Japan who have a passion to teach Japanese language, and they could be placed in dedicated and willing institutions to teach the language on a subsidised contractual arrangement. Besides, a good rapport between the language teaching institutions and the local Japanese community (men, women and children) will facilitate mutual appreciation of

the two cultures and also enhance the scope for developing communication skills among students.

Japanese businessmen appreciate the Indian talents. While many of the Indian companies are able to vibe well and be successful in their business with Japanese, after years, some times even after decades of arduous exercise. If considerable effort and time is spent in providing Japanese language communication skills to their key workforce, the rapport '*nakayoku*' can be built between them with ease.

The coming decades are going to witness India and Japan working together closely in several areas. A great deal of effort should be put in to pave the way for the two countries to come closer. Language should not be a barrier in achieving this objective.

There has to be a shift in the mind set of both Indian and Japanese businessmen. The Japanese businessmen who come to do business in India can set aside some time to be spent with the Indian businessmen to understand the business environ and business nuances and widen their contacts so that they will not feel strange in the new soil. The fact that India is a vast country and people are heterogeneous, each region, be it east, west, north or south have different culture, language and work culture, should be appreciated and understood by the Japanese. A sound knowledge of the land and the people can help Japanese businessmen succeed in their mission. It is of utmost important for every Japanese (be it business or otherwise) to utilise every opportunity to mix with their local Indian neighbours and benefit by their knowledge and experience.

Finally, a few words to the Indian entrepreneurs who look up to Japan for trade, technology and investment. Japan is known for its advanced technology. If Japanese technology has to be appropriately harnessed and put to use in the Indian soil, as envisioned by Prime Minister Modi's "Make in India", the Japanese language should not come as a barrier. An average Indian would easily know at least three languages and hence learning another language is not going to be an arduous task. Similarly, the citizen of a vast country, having moved to different parts and absorbed the culture is never going to be tired of absorbing one more culture - the Japanese culture, and the high family and business values of Indian and Japanese are similar. If we are able to break the barrier of Japanese language, the Sky is the limit for India-Japan *bonhomie* !





INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

No. 21, K.B. Dasan Road, Teynampet, Chennai - 600 018, Tamilnadu, India.
Tel: 91-44-2435-2010 / 2435-4779, E-mail : indo-japan@ijcci.com Website: www.ijcci.com