

# Envisaging India-Japan Partnership: An Analysis

## ABSTRACT

On 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the Minister of External Affairs of India visited Japan and meet his Japanese counterpart Kamikawa Yoko where they discussed about the bilateral relations and Dr. S Jaishankar highlighted that Japan-India Special Strategic Global Partnership marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko opined that “*as the world is at a turning point in history, Japan seeks to further work with India, an important partner in “co-creating” new solutions through dialogue and collaboration, and to further strengthen cooperation between the two countries*”.<sup>1</sup> This visit was followed by the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting where all the four countries reaffirmed their commitment and efforts to preserve the international order as well as work on challenges which they faced in the region of Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between India and Japan is that of a ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’ which has evolved over a period of time with the year of 2022 being 70 years of diplomatic relations. This relationship took a turn in the late 2000s with China’s rise which was one of the common concerns for India and Japan. Another reason that India and Japan aimed to strengthen their efforts in the sea lanes of communication was to work peacefully and effectively in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond which was facing threats due to Chinese aggression. 2012 onwards, the relationship took another turn when Prime Minister Abe decided to opening address and deal with Chinese aggression as seen in the Project Syndicate. Further, the bonhomie between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe took the relationship to a deeper meaning with greater scope of strategic cooperation as both the countries started to strengthen their defence relations in 2021 through the first “2+2” ministerial discussion. One of the most recent developments which took place was in March 2022, when Japanese Prime Minister Kishida visited India gave his speech “the Future of the Indo-Pacific—Japan’s New Plan for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ — ‘Together with India, as an Indispensable Partner’” at Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) gave this relationship a greater push to work on stronger cooperation. The paper will briefly high the importance landmarks in the relationship between India and Japan and, highlight the areas of cooperation for future endeavours.

**Key words:** India-Japan Strategic partnership, Indo-Pacific, Confluence of Two Seas, Northeast India, FOIP, Act East Policy.

## Years of Partnerships

The relationship between India and Japan can be traced back to the civilisational and cultural ties where the earliest documentation of cultural and spiritual exchange happened when the consecration of Lord Buddha was performed by an Indian monk Bodhisena in 752 AD.<sup>3</sup> Later, in the contemporary times, Indians had associations with Japan, and this could be seen in Swami Vivekananda’s appreciation for patriotism and Japanese art, and he opined that “*The world has never seen such a patriotic and artistic race as the Japanese, and one special feature about them is this that while*

*in Europe and elsewhere Art generally goes with dirt, Japanese Art is Art plus absolute cleanliness. I would wish that every one of our young men could visit Japan once at least in his lifetime.*”<sup>4</sup> Rabindranath Tagore had also visited Japan several times in 1916, 1924 and 1929 and he became an admirer of Japanese art and culture, economic growth, scientific achievements and the progress in the domain of industry and, valued the spirit of Asian Nationalism after Japan’s victory.<sup>5</sup> Apart from them, many Indians like JRD Tata, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, Rash Behari Bose, and Justice Radha Binod Pal<sup>6</sup> had visited Japan and left a lasting impact. This phase that India and Japan cultivated paved the way for Asianism and the need to rely on one another through ideas and thoughts was the way forward.

This relationship then took the turn of diplomatic relations on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1952<sup>7</sup> and later, in the year of 2011,

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India and Japan celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. India and Japan ties quickly took the turn of economic relations when Japan chose to give India a yen loan and later, in 1983, Suzuki Motor Corporation began to manufacture cars in India<sup>8</sup> and later, in 2007 during “*the Joint Statement on the Roadmap for New Dimensions to the Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India*” a greater focus was put on the “Comprehensive Economic Partnership between India and Japan” which focused on expansion of bilateral trade, high quality and mutually benefitted negotiations on EPA/CEPA, ODAs, promotion of the special economic partnership initiative covering the dedicated freight corridor, industrial corridor of Delhi-Mumbai, manufacturing program, collaboration with IITDM, information and communication technology progress and efforts.<sup>9</sup> One must understand that Japan’s economic growth in the 1960s was an excellent model for the world and with manufacturing companies being setup in India, it paved the way for greater economic development for India. Also, India in the 1990s was looking at liberalisation, privation and globalisation, these policies made India work in the domain of economic development and with Japan providing the ODA’s it helped India fulfil several of its dreams. Japan’s contribution for India’s infrastructural development would change the way India is seen regionally and globally and if the high-speed rail project is a grand success in India, Japan can present the Indian model to the world specially to India’s neighbourhood and get more infrastructural projects in India’s vicinity. Further, in the domain of infrastructural development, Japan has been a master in developing smart cities and industrial corridors and one such example can be seen in Manesar. India has always been a sort after market in Asia and Japan has understood that and that’s why there is an immense increase in Japanese companies functioning in India. In the recent times, one can see many Japanese restaurants and Gurugram has become an excellent centre for authentic Japanese food. Another advantage for Japan is that India is a hub of surplus labour both skilled and unskilled and with Japan’s ageing population, India’s workforce is something Japan would like to capture. India is home to an excellent supply of engineers and Japan would like to use that pool of specified skilled labour and to do so, it has relaxed the visa preferences for the specified skilled workforce.<sup>10</sup> Several Japanese universities are giving fully funded scholarships for STEM based students to study in Japan and in other cases, Japanese universities are also tying

up with IIT’s to get the best pool of engineering students to study and work in Japan and help in the technological development. In the recent times, QUAD scholarship has specially focused on STEM based scholarships for all the students from Quad countries and so, Japan and US become the most applied for choice.

In the post-cold war era, when the world was dealing with non-traditional threats like piracy and terrorism, India and Japan had also decided to work on these issues and aimed to establish a ‘*Global Partnership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*’ which also paved the way for ‘Comprehensive Security Dialogue’, military to military talks and overall, enhance bilateral defence cooperation. The decade of 2000s was a period when India and Japan realised that the sea lanes of communication were vital for stronger economic relations and so, they wanted to work around in those lines. China, too at that time was economically rising and gaining military might and was trying to also get a hold on those sea lanes of communication which was a major cause of concern for India and Japan. In 2005, “*India-Japan Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of India-Japan Global Partnership*” took place, where they focused on the ‘eight-fold initiative’ which were the enhancement of dialogues and exchanges, economic engagement, security cooperation, initiatives in science and technology, people-to people interactions, cultural relations and academic interactions and initiatives, ushering the new Asian era, cooperation in United Nations and other international organisations and dealing with international challenges of terrorism, energy, and environmental issues.<sup>11</sup> This partnership took the relationship to a stronger domain of economic interactions along with maintaining several common areas of cooperation. Japan being an island nation realised that the only way to strengthen its position in the waters for economic development and uninterrupted sea lanes of communication, it needs to look at lesser-known partners like India. The Indian Ocean is a major juncture for the sea lanes of communication as seen in K. M. Panikkar’s ‘*India and the Indian Ocean*’ where Sardar Panikkar has beautifully explained the importance of Indian Ocean and whoever controls the Indian Ocean would have access to all the trade routes. With India being the net security provider in the Indian Ocean and in the ancient times too, we have seen that all European powers looked at the Indian Ocean for all answers to their need for power, territory, resources and control and so, the Indian Ocean does become a vital point of

access to all countries in the present situation too. Japan knowing India's influence in the Indian Ocean realised the need to work in closer coordination with India to not only aim for stronger sea lanes of communication, prevention of piracy, maritime terrorism and, working on HADR for greater capacity building and cooperation with countries in the Indian Ocean Region.

The relationship between India and Japan came to a new crossroad where their partnership took a stronger look at working on the sea lanes of communication. The need to work in the domain of maritime was taken by seriously and this resulted in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's iconic speech "*Confluence of Two Seas*" in the Indian Parliament where he focused on 'Japan's Broader Asia Policy' and highlighted the value of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.<sup>12</sup> After the iconic speech, in the year of 2007, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue took place between the US, Japan, Australia, and India and this was followed by first multilateral exercise, TRILATEX-07 which took place in the Pacific region on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the Indian Navy, JMDF, and the US Navy.<sup>13</sup> Further, during the 2008, "*Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation*" where they focused on their common interest in the domain of safety of sea lines of communication, replenishment activities in the Indian Ocean, coast guards cooperation to promote maritime security, protection of marine environment, and joint exercises.<sup>14</sup> What Japan was doing was to have greater access and say in the Indian Ocean as its trade passed through it but also provide any assistance needed as it would help gain greater bonhomie between the two countries and their armed forces and so, help the Japanese forces learn from the Indian Armed forces to deal with situations of emergencies and information sharing in the region. Later, we saw that in December 2018, the information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region was set by India to work on capacity building in the domain of maritime security and maritime domain awareness.<sup>15</sup>

India and Japan started to garner support for one another in the domain of security and defence cooperation and many efforts were made in the 2008 for the 'Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation'. Furthermore, on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2009, an '*Action Plan to advance Security Cooperation*' was formed based out of the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation which covered areas of defence cooperation like regular meetings between Ministers of Defence, Annual Defence Policy Dialogue, Annual military-to-military talks, Service Chiefs regular reciprocal visits, ground-to-ground talks, navy-to-

navy talks, bilateral and multilateral naval exercises, cooperation on core abilities of maritime operation and disaster relief, passing exercise, air force exercise, researcher exchange in defence institutions, programs and training seminars for cadets and young officers, intelligence exchange and technical cooperation on counter terrorism and setting up of information exchange framework for financial intelligence units on money laundering and terrorist financing.<sup>16</sup> One has to understand that in 2012, when Prime Minister Abe came back for the second time, he worked on a diplomatic strategy called the "*Asia's Democratic Security Diamond*" on the website of Project Syndicate where he focused on the ongoing issues and conflicts in the East China Sea and South China Sea and opined that there was a need to create a strategy where the Quad partners would safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>17</sup> Things got more exciting and interesting in the domain of India-Japan defence and security relations and on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014, "*the Tokyo Declaration for Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership*" discussed about several developments and aimed to work on the development of the Indian aircraft industry, unmanned Ground Vehicle (UGV) and robotics.<sup>18</sup> One has to understand that development in the Indian aircraft industry would help increase India's efforts of AtmaNirbhar Bharat as well as make India an important contributor in the aircraft industry and this was followed by agreements on transfer of the defence equipment and technology as well as agreement concerning the security measures for the protection of the classified military information in 2015 paved the way for greater defence cooperation and military know how.<sup>19</sup>

Further, on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited India, and both the leaders came up with the "*Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership: Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World*" where they aimed for a vision for a deeper, broad-based and action-oriented partnership in the Indo-Pacific region realising the need for a peaceful, open, equitable, stable and a rules-based order.<sup>20</sup> The leaders also focused on India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" to work on a reliability, sustainability and resilient infrastructure, industrial networks, regional value chains and connectivity especially for the high speed rail, western dedicated freight corridor, Delhi-Mumbai Industrial corridor and Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial corridor.<sup>21</sup> This partnership was different from earlier times as it

was a more action-oriented and a special focus was on the Indo-Pacific region. The need to work for a rules-based international order clearly meant the need to work on dealing with Chinese aggression and belligerence in the East China Sea and South China Sea. In this same year in October, Japan had participated along with India and the US for the Malabar exercise and later, the Indian Navy participated in the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force.<sup>22</sup> One needs to also look at the Japan-India Summit Meeting held on 2 April 2016, where Prime Minister Abe opined that Japan had serious concerns for affairs in the East China Sea and the South China Sea as unilateral actions were taken place to change the status quo and increase tensions in the region.<sup>23</sup> With greater focus on the Indo-Pacific, India and Japan believed that they could play a central role in safeguarding and strengthening a rules-based order and they could fulfil those by covering maritime security, Indo-Pacific connectivity, joint exercises, defence equipment and technology, surveillance and unmanned system technologies, investment promotion partnerships, energy, space, bio-technology, pharmaceuticals, tourism, skill development, civil aviation, sports and cyber security and all this was highlighted in their “*Japan-India Joint Statement: Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific*” in 2017.<sup>24</sup>

Another major development which took place was in October 2018, during the Japan-India Annual Summit where Prime Minister Modi recognised the relationship between India and Japan to have transformed into a partnership which had great substance and purpose and India’s ‘Act East Policy’ was the cornerstone for it as India’s ‘North Eastern Region’(NER) through the ‘Japan-India Act East Forum’ would focus on projects of connectivity, sustainable forests, ecological management, disaster risk management and reduction, people-to-people exchanges and development of smart islands in India.<sup>25</sup> In the same meeting itself, Prime Minister Abe opined that relationship between India and Japan worked on regional order and was determined to advance the new era of relations between India and Japan in the domain of Indo-Pacific.<sup>26</sup> During this meeting, the centrality and unity of ASEAN was the heart of the Indo-Pacific concept and the relations with other partners were vital for the rules-based international order where everyone respects each other’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, freedom of navigation and overflight.<sup>27</sup> The need to work in synergy with countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh and

Africa would help the collaborative projects.<sup>28</sup> The need to work on the NER was essential as India’s Northeast region connects to Southeast Asia which would further, help connect to Japan. The development of India’s northeast is vital as it the bridge or the connector between Southeast Asian trade and commerce routes, markets, products, and resources and this would be beneficial as cultural interactions will help greater to people-to-people exchanges. Japan would also get access to all the facilities in Southeast Asia and India’s Northeast and this way, greater economic development, job opportunities, sustainable livelihoods and eventually, lead to a peaceful and prosperous rules-based international order.

On 8 March 2019, India and Japan conducted their first meeting on Space Dialogue and in the 2018 Summit Meeting, both the leaders had expressed their commitment for the promotion of long-term sustainability of the activities in outer space and both, the countries decided to launch the Annual Space Dialogue for stronger relations in the domain of outer space where they would work to cooperate on the exchange of information on space security, space industries, global navigation satellite security, space situational awareness, space related norms and bilateral relations between JAXA-ISRO and so, the leaders also welcomed the technological collaboration for a joint Lunar Polar Exploration Mission.<sup>29</sup> With the advent of space security, explorations and space commercialisation, countries started to give a look at their space capabilities and one alarming reason for India and Japan was China’s ever expanding space security and commercialisation domain. The outer space was becoming a new domain of future wars, and some called it the space wars where there would be a scramble for space colonies. In 2020, China’s ‘New Infrastructure Project’ highlighted the civil-military integration of the satellite and private participation with a focus on digital connectivity for BRI purposes. In 2021, under the leadership of Prime Minister Suga, Japan was aiming to become digitalised and wanted to work on a safe and reliable 5G network and submarine cable to deal with the industrial competitiveness and supply chain<sup>30</sup> and India was already on the path of digitalisation.

The pandemic had shaken the world, the post-covid world had to be better place to live and India and Japan in their 2022 meeting focused on other aspects of their relationship which would help in the greater common good of the world. In 2022, at “*the Japan-India Summit Joint Statement: Partnership for a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous Post-COVID World*”, both the leaders

spoke about their need to contribute to the global efforts to combat the COVID-19 and they welcomed the Quad Vaccine Partnership which help enhance the equitable access to safe and effective vaccines in the region of the Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>31</sup> Other areas of cooperation that the two countries highlighted were importance of tackling climate change, pragmatic energy transitions to achieving global net-zero emission, industrial cooperation for MSME, manufacturing, and supply chains, strengthening of the protection of critical infrastructure, development of digital technologies partnership in areas like IoT, AI, other emerging technologies, cyber security, initiatives in India's Northeast focus on the Bamboo Value Chain, healthcare, forest resource management, connectivity, and tourism and skill development and job opportunities.<sup>32</sup> Further, in another speech in March 2023, the Japanese Prime Minister Kishida gave a speech "*The Future of the Indo-Pacific—Japan's New Plan for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"—"Together with India, as an Indispensable Partner"*" at Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) highlighted the four new pillars of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and he opined that "*FOIP an approach focusing on "people", being not limited to national level. We will strengthen the "knowledge" connectivity that, focusing on "people", helps "human resource development", creates new innovations, and underpins the vitality of the region"*.<sup>33</sup> This clearly meant that people-to-people exchanges, and cooperation were essential for the exchange of knowledge and so, this exchange of knowledge would help create newer innovations and increase the standard of living of this region.

It can be said that India and Japan due to its historical interactions with one another deeply acknowledge the value and hard work put in this relationship. This partnership is a result of trust and continuous efforts by both the sides to cooperate with one another through discussions and dialogues. Thereby, it is their greater responsibility to maintain and strengthen the ties between the two countries in the domain of Indo-Pacific and work on establishing a more peaceful and sustainable free and open international order based on the rule of law and respect.

### **Areas of cooperation**

To take the relationship between India and Japan to greater heights, there is a few suggestions that the two countries can work together on.

- **Healthcare Cooperation**

With the coming of the COVID-19, it has been realised that healthcare sector is one of the most

important sectors that India and Japan can work on. About the ageing population in Japan, India must work on training specialised skilled medicine doctors, nurses, and staff to be able to work and settle in Japan. For example, many nurses from the state of Kerala move to the Middle East for better job opportunities as medical nurses and staff, the same way, Japan must make their medical work environment more inviting and financially rewarding for the nursing staff to learn the Japanese language and work in Japan.

Secondly, the medical equipment and machinery that Japanese companies sell in India need to have a proper urgent basis service centre as many doctors who end up purchasing expensive medical equipment are stuck as there is a lack of proper service sectors. The other issue that doctors face when trying to get their medical equipment fixed is the small spare parts availability in India. Since, the equipment and machines are made in Japan, the spare parts are also made and sourced there, so by the time, the spare parts come to India, it is already a loss for the medical practitioner. In this case, Japan can set up an industrial corridor only to make such small spare parts in India with the Japanese quality check, Indian skilled workforce can be trained and monitored by Japanese specialist and this way it would help create job opportunities in India, reduce the wait period for the medical practitioners and help Japanese medical equipment companies give timely service.

India's Northeast is become the cancer hub and due to which the Assam Government in collaboration with the Tata Trust have established 8 cancer hospitals. To reduce cancer deaths, there is a need to work on early detection and early diagnosis and so, Japanese medical equipment suppliers can work on developing a market to supply cheaper cancer care equipment and machines as it will help people. With reduced costs in cancer treatment, more and more people across India and across the globe can travel to India's Northeast and get good quality and reasonable cancer treatment.

- **Japanese Language Outreach**

The Japanese Government in collaboration with the Japan Foundation must set up language labs in various schools where Japanese Language would be taught through audio visual techniques, story telling methods, use of manga with easy words and

hiragana script to keep the child interested and also, give scholarships to school children to be motivated to learn the Japanese language and eventually study in Japan for higher education and also, promote job opportunities. The students who are awarded the scholarship must be called for an interview by NHK and other Indian news channels so that students are aware of these kinds of scholarships. There is a need to hold regular calligraphy competition where students can choose their favoured Japanese script and learn while competing in the competition. The JLPT examination could be made easier, or they could hold the examination four times rather two times, making it possible for a candidate to give more attempts in one year of learning and practice. Many Instagram channels run Japanese Language classes, there is a need to verify them and help students identify who to study from as today social media is an excellent way to learn languages.

- **Japanese Studies Centres and Departments in Government and Private Universities**

The Japanese Government in collaboration with the Japanese Embassy in India must work to financially help and support several Government colleges and Private Universities help set up Japanese language centres, labs and study areas. Also, with the language training, skill development and understanding about Japan, its history, culture and people would be a good start to motivate students to learn the language and so, specialise in Japanese studies. These centres can also hold weekly lectures on Japanese history, art, economics, scientific development and this also, be accompanied with manga movie night which could be sponsored by crunchy roll. To cultivate an interest in students, there is a need to hold Japan Fair and, bring in elements of the ComicCon so that students will be interested in experiencing it. In these fairs, Japanese food companies and restaurants can come introduce students to Japanese cuisine. Fuji Films or Canon can be sponsors for these events and, help create a photo competition which will increase the participation of the students.

- **Semiconductor Supply Chain Industrial Township**

India is already developing itself as a semiconductor base where it would be a big advantage and, help Japan in a big way for its automobile industry. Japan can help create a semiconductor industrial township which would have state of the art equipment and

machinery with proper training centres and living accommodations for the skilled workforce. Japan should try and make this semiconductor industrial township near an airport so that it would be easy to deliver on time. This township should be built in such a way that there should be specialised schools teaching students this curriculum along with their generic studying so that they also trained in vocational training which would also help them get jobs in small scale industries where they develop small spare parts.

## Conclusion

The relationship between India and Japan has been successful for efforts made by both the sides. Another reason for this successful partnership has been the bonhomie between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe as their friendship at a personal level has greatly benefitted India and Japan. Both Japan and India consider each other all-weather friends as they have many concern goals and interests aligned in the same direction and that makes it easier for both to function so effortlessly.

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