



Buddhism: A shared path or connection between India and Japan.

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Abstract: *The mystical teachings of Buddhism offer a path for transforming one's being. Its foundation was laid by Lord Buddha, a prince named Siddhartha, by his parents, also known as Shakyamuni. India's rich Buddhist heritage is related to Japan and other nations such as China and Thailand. While Buddhism was prevalent in India and Japan, it gained popularity in Japan during the sixth century. The Japanese people have kept the Buddhist faith alive alongside their native Shinto traditions. They even show their deep respect for Sakyamuni Buddha by preserving Buddhist sites worldwide, not just in Japan but also in India. India's policy-makers were thankful to Japan for safeguarding and promoting the shared Buddhist heritage. Japan became the first country to practice Buddhism for diplomatic reasons, and its soft-power Buddhist diplomacy gained momentum when Crown Prince Akihito and Crown Princess Michiko visited India for their pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. This is how India and Japan's relationship became strong when they connected on various platforms, not just for cultural, political, and economic but for entertainment purposes. This paper will highlight the impact of Buddhism on India and Japan and how both nations strive towards the common objective of cultural and social harmony.*

Keywords: *Buddhism, Bodhisena, Shodo, Culture, and Traditions.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism is an ancient Indian religion that arose in and around the ancient kingdom of Magadha, which is now in Bihar, India, and follows the teachings of Gautama Buddha. He was known as Buddha, which stands for 'awakening one'. However, many Buddhist doctrines suggest that there were many Buddhas before him—Buddhism as a religion spread to other parts of the world during the time of Buddha himself. During the times of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, the Buddhist community was divided into two different branches such as Mahasanghika and Sthaviravada, and each of these branches spread to other parts of India and was divided into many sub-sects. Today, two main branches of Buddhism are apparent: the Theravada in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia and the Mahayana in the Himalayas and East Asia. While Vajrayana's Buddhist tradition is sometimes relegated as a part of Mahayana Buddhism, some scholars consider it a different branch.

According to Buddhist texts, the founder of Buddhism was born in 563 B.C.E in the region now known as southern Nepal. He was born a prince named Siddhartha, also known as Shakyamuni, the sage of the Shakya clan. Siddhartha left his palace at a young age, renouncing his princely life and leaving his wife and children behind when he learned about human suffering. His father does not want him to undergo any suffering and pain. He went on a spiritual journey to find the cause or reason for human suffering. After renouncing all the comforts and riches, he became a wandering monk. After years of searching, he finally found his answer and spread the message among the masses. When he died, he achieved Nirvana at Bodh Gaya, Bihar, defined as the final release from earthly suffering. Thus, he became the Buddha, the awakened or enlightened one. After his death, Buddhist teachings were written down by his followers, who spread his message worldwide.

As a belief system, Buddhism is a spiritual philosophy that provides a framework for those searching for profound meaning in life. Its 'panchsheel' principles were used for the first time by India's first Prime Minister,



Jawaharlal Nehru. The fifth of these five principles, "sanskriti" and "sabha," discusses using India's cultural connections with other countries as a part of its soft power strategy. Such principles were an effort to recover ancient Buddhist connections with Asian countries and are a part of India's "Look East, Act East" policy. In this way, India's rich cultural connections with other nations were utilised to develop Buddhist sites in India or neighbouring countries where Buddhism is practised, or their teachings become a prominent part of the masses (Narsimhan 2).

One sees how Buddhism became a prominent belief system in other parts of the world when a long-established East Asian route of trade and influence ran from northern China through the Korean peninsula and across the Korean straits to Japan. Thus, travelling along this route, Mahayana Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea in the sixth century. It is believed that Buddhism came to Japan either in 538 or 552 as part of a diplomatic mission. It included gifts such as an image of Shakyamuni Buddha and several volumes of Buddhist texts. It used to be believed that in the case of Korea, Buddhism does have a lasting influence on its native culture and inhabitants. In Japan, Buddhism was established in the region by the seventh century, and they built dozens of temple complexes, various orders of priests, and a body of skilled artisans employed to craft the icons and other accoutrements required to practice the faith. One can observe that Chinese Buddhism and Korean Buddhism inspired Japanese Buddhism. It is also seen that Vajrayana, or Esoteric Buddhism, and its attendant pantheon of deities and secret, mystical rituals were also introduced to Japan in the early Heian period by several Japanese priests. Some scholars believe they studied or came across this religion in China and built several monasteries back home. There were two monasteries among these monasteries, which became the centres of the leading Japanese Buddhist sects, namely Tendai and Shingon. Images of wrathful deities such as Fudo Myo-o, which means 'Achala' in Sanskrit, were also established as part of the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon.

India and Japan relations go back a long way and were initially established by the spread of Buddhism in Japan. Since Buddhism originated in India first, it is natural that it will play a significant role in nurturing and sustaining cultural relations between the two countries. Even though trade and economics have dominated the relationship between both countries in the 21st century, the cultural ties between India and Japan have continued to thrive. Since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1952, they have enjoyed cordial relations. This relationship has also become more vital in other fields because both nations enjoy a close-knit relationship in the current scenario. They also shared a religious relationship when the Indian monk Bodhisena arrived in Japan in 736 to propagate Buddhism and performed the eye-opening ceremony for the giant bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana built-in Todai ji. Dosen also played a significant role in the ceremony. Bodhisena stayed in Japan until he died in 760. Therefore, India and Japan are guided or inspired by the same cultural traditions, including the shared heritage of Buddhism, and also emphasise the common ideals of democracy, tolerance, pluralism and open societies. Indian culture, filtered through Buddhism, has dramatically influenced Japanese people's sense of closeness to India. One can make a point here that several Indian personalities like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and JRD Tata are also closely connected with Japan in different capacities and were greatly impressed by the land of the rising sun. The Japan-India Association was set up in 1903 and is thought to be the oldest international body in Japan.

It is noteworthy that to present a peaceful image of itself, Japan has taken steps to introduce other Asian nations to its unique traditional art forms such as Noh Theatre, Kabuki opera, chanoyu (tea ceremony), shodo (calligraphy), bonsai (miniature tree cultivation), and suibokuga (black-ink painting) to other Asian nations. These traditional art forms draw inspiration from Zen Buddhist philosophy. The initiation of Buddhism in Japan is somewhat different from Kami worship. These were the same ancient native belief systems that created political struggles between pro- and anti-Buddhist groups. Eventually, the adherents of Buddhism prevailed, and this new religion was firmly established in the country under imperial sponsorship. Buddhism brought it with a political structure, advanced technologies, and sophisticated cultural practices- including music, dance, and a new writing system. At the same time, it also elaborated the Buddhist art that would revolutionise several aspects of Japanese life. Currently, thirteen schools of Buddhism exist in Japan, and the majority of the population professes to be Buddhist. Moreover, Japan has about 80,000 Buddhist temples, with 150,000 priests and several colleges dedicated chiefly to Buddhist studies. In 1988, then-Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi attended the opening ceremony of the festival of India in Japan. The Japan Foundation opened its office in New Delhi in 1994, and at the same time, it is actively promoting cultural exchanges between both countries. They also hold cultural events to deepen the ancient relations between the two. In 2009, the Indian Cultural Centre was formally inaugurated in Tokyo to offer classes on Yoga, Tabla, Indian Classical dances, and Hindi and Bengali languages. Japan also extends or provides cultural grants-in-aid to research institutes, universities, and cultural facilities to encourage their activities. There is a UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund working towards preserving and restoring Sanchi and Satdhara Buddhist monuments. Japan has also extended their support in the construction of Nalanda University.



2. CONCLUSION :

Therefore, India and Japan are connected at various levels. In today's time, economics and trade have come to dominate the relations between the two countries, but that has not dimmed the cultural ties between the two countries, which started with the coming of Buddhism into Japan. Japan has supported numerous projects to revive and develop various Buddhist sites in India, which has helped India to preserve Buddhism's spirit. Nalanda University, India's oldest educational institution, has been rebuilt from the ruins of time to facilitate a dialogue with countries where Buddhism is a significant part of people's lives. Thus, Buddhism has become a common ground for fostering harmonious relationships between India and Japan.

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