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Indo-Japan Cultural Similarities

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Abstract

In this article, I would like to present the cultural similarities between India and Japan. Both the countries have always shared a good relationship with regard to political relations, economic cooperation, and technological cooperation, correlation in business, the railway sector, education, and many other factors. It is to be noted that the Indo- Japan relationship has a long history rooted in many aspects. There is a bilateral connection in terms of cultural affinity and spiritual analogy. Culture is nothing but ideas, customs, traditions, and behaviour of mankind of a particular people or society. While going through the historic culture of both the regions, I found many interesting similarities and connection of cultures between India and Japan which was due to the diffusion of traits from India to Japan through China and Korea. This ethnology discussed below gives the indirect cultural exchange in many aspects between the two nations.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that many of the cultural practices of Japan is influenced by Indian cultures such as usage of appellations like 'Thiru/Thirumati, Shri/shrimati, Ji' in India, and 'San/ Sama' in Japanese. Adding on it, the likeness of martial Arts such as Kalari payattu, silambam, and Gatka in India and Samurai, Karate, Kendo, Judo in Japan, gestures like bowing and joining hands unlike Western countries, food and agricultural comparisons, doll festival, the family system where people used to live in joint families earlier and there will be one head for the family similar to that of India, however, the joint family system has gradually declined in both the regions and people have started living in small families and worship complex, the influence of Indian languages in Japanese and many more. Here, I would like to highlight the similarities of certain factors in precise.

2. Food

Being Asian countries, India and Japan have a multitude of cultural similarities. Both eat and grow rice and use noodles in their cuisines (especially in Northeast and South India). Both have dumplings in their cuisines (momos, modak and Kozhukattai in India and nikuman in Japan). One of the famous beverages, tea is also important in both regions. Though tea was originated in India and its cultivation is the major part of the agriculture here, it is also diffused in many parts of the world. Japan follows the tradition known as the 'Sadou' – Tea ceremony, this act proves that there had been the trait shift that had taken place.

3. Traditional practices & Doll Festival

This is another distinct cultural feature that India shares with Japan. Navratri, also known as Vijayadashami in the south, beckons householders to rummage their attics and bring down their choicest dolls to decorate their homes up with for a nine-day 'Golu'. Navratri celebrates the power of female goddesses in all her manifestations. These 9 days of Navratri celebrate the nine incarnations of Goddess Durga, with each day designated to an avatar of Goddess Durga. During Golu, families or friends visit each other's houses with gifts to view and discuss over the golu display, share festive foods, and sing devotional songs. 'Hinamatsuri' in Japan also known as 'Dolls Day' or 'Girls Day', is celebrated on March 3. The festival derives its origins from a millenium-old Japanese custom — *hina-nagashi* — of setting straw dolls, containing all the evil spirits from the land, adrift into the sea. During Hina matsuri, Parents pray for their daughters' happiness, growth, and good health on this day. This festival had its origin about 1,000 years ago in the Heian Period (794-1192). It is a tradition to display ceremonial dolls on tiers of shelves covered with scarlet carpet. These dolls are dressed in the fashion of the people of the ancient court. The Emperor and Empress are placed on the upper-most tier, followed by the ladies in waiting and ministers. Traditionally, girls in Japan invite their friends to a home party to celebrate this festival. Many people prepare a special meal for girls on this day, including savory dishes. While Indian homes are adorned with idols of various deities and dolls of all styles and sizes for nine days, the Japanese have a single-day counterpart.

4. Religious connection

In India, there are multiple religions followed based on different regions, customs, and traditions. The people of India and Japan have engaged in cultural exchanges, primarily as a result of Buddhism which spread indirectly from India to Japan. The Indian monk Bodhisena arrived in Japan in 736 to spread Buddhism and performed eye-opening of the Great Buddha built in Todai-ji. 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. The cultural exchanges between the two countries created many parallels in their folklore, sometimes bearing references to common deities. God Ganesha, worshipped as a remover of obstacles and as a God of good fortune, is known as God Kangiten in Japan, worshipped for the same. Lord Yama, riding a buffalo is known as Lord Emma- Ten in Japan as the chief judge in the afterlife. Lord Indra, The king of heaven is known as Lord Taishiku – Ten in Japan. Chakra, the Centre of the spiritual energy of the human body is known as Chakura in Japan. God Brahma is known as God Bon-Ten, represented with four faces and four arms who lords over the heavenly realm of rebirth called ‘the Brahmaloaka’. Similarly, Goddess Lakshmi known as Goddess Kichijjo-Ten in Japan, worshipped as the goddess of fortune, prosperity, and beauty depicted with “Nyoihouju” gem (wish-fulfilling jewel) in her hand similar to the depiction of Goddess Lakshmi with gold coins, standing on a lotus flower. Goddess Benzaiten in Japan is similar to Goddess Saraswati, represented with musical instrument Biwa in her hand.

5. Language reciprocity

Similarities between Sanskrit and Japanese:

The seed syllables or beejaksharas in Sanskrit are considered as a holy model in Japan and people have it in their homes for spiritual benefits. Sanskrit alphabets can be seen in Japanese tombs. The fifth century ‘Siddham script’ which has disappeared in India, is still in use in Japan. This is axiomatic that there are many similarities in languages and there are many more inter-connections between the cultures.

Similarities between Tamil and Japanese:

There also seems an affinity between Tamil and Japanese. Susumu Ohno, a renowned linguist, and classicist came along and popularized the theory that Japanese was overwhelmingly influenced by Dravidian languages, particularly Tamil, brought to these shores some 2,000 years ago during the Yayoi Period (500 B.C. to 300 A.D.), when the Japanese began rice-paddy cultivation. Comparability in grammar, pointing to a similar presence of relative pronouns, a likeness in word order, and a striking resemblance in the languages’ rhythms. The particles are the same and easily relatable to Japanese. Being a Tamilian and a Japanese learner, I found striking similarities between these two languages and also felt easy to form sentences in Japanese just by thinking of that in Tamil. Here are a few things that are expressed in the same way in both these languages: The expression, “Kono kusuri wa kikimasu ka” means “is this medicine effective?” but when spoken, this sentence can be taken to mean “will this medicine listen” – “kikimasu” means “listen” although while writing, the kanji 効 (meaning effective) is used and not the kanji 聞 (meaning listen). In Tamil, we say “Indha marundhu kekuma” which literally means “will this medicine listen”. When you want to say “try this cake” in Japanese, you would say “Kono keeki wo tabete mite”. In Tamil too, we say “Saptu paar” which means “Eat and see”. When you leave home, you would tell the folks at home “poitu varen” in Tamil which when translated would mean “I will go (now) and come(back)”. In Japanese, we have “Itte kimasu”. When you are going out to buy something, you say “vaangitu varen” in Tamil which in English would be “I will buy and come(return)”. The Japanese say “Katte kimasu” which means the same thing. When you teach something for someone, you say “solli kudupen” in Tamil which means “teach and give” and in Japanese you say “Oshiete agemasu” where “oshieru” is to teach and “agemasu” means give. When you buy something for future use, you would say “Katte okimasu” in Japanese whereas In Tamil, we have the same expression “vaangi vekkaren” which literally means “buy and keep” in English. Similarly, when you are hungry, you would say “Onaka ga suite imasu” in Japanese which has an exact Tamil translation of ‘vayiru pasikudhu’.

The Japanese particles are also directly relatable to Tamil- The particle ‘wa’ in Japanese even though does not carry a meaning, is used as a subject marker. Taking this sentence for an instance, ‘Kore wa pen desu’ which in Tamil means, ‘Idhu vandhu pen’ which conveys the meaning this is a pen. The particle ‘mo’ which means also in English denotes the exact sound of ‘um’ in Tamil. Example: ‘kore mo’(this also)- idhuvum in Tamil. Particle ‘wo’ in Japanese is used to refer direct objects like if want to say ‘I buy a camera’ which can be translated in Tamil as ‘camera vai vaanguren’ being ‘vai’ referring to the particle wo in the Japanese sentence ‘ Kamera o(wo) kaimasu’. Bringing the correlation of pronouns in Japanese, We have pronouns like ‘kono, sono, ano and dono’ in Japanese which exactly in Tamil means ‘indha, andha and endha?’ means ‘this, that and which’ in English. Another interesting similarity is the Ideophonic words which is uncommon or relatively less in western languages. We have numerous words in the category in both Tamil and Japanese. Example: “Gada-gada, thona-thona, Viru-viru” in tamil. We also have typical words in Japanese such as “pika-pika, hi ni – hi ni, pecha-kucha, waku waku, toki- doki”, etc. Apart from this, there are various Japanese grammar and phrases which could be very much expressive as that of Tamil.

6. Thirukural and Haiku:

‘Thirukural’ is one of the most important forms of Tamil poetry written by Thiruvalluvar. It is a very short poetic form in two lines with the first line consisting of four words and three words in the second line. On the other hand, we have ‘Haiku’ in Japanese, which is a traditional poem with three lines, usually written in five- seven-five syllable count. Even though the idea of Haiku originated in Japan, there are numerous Haiku poems written in Tamil too. While Thirukural mainly emphasizes the human values and hints a message, Haiku, however, focuses mainly on nature and does not always convey a message. In addition to that, Tamil movies have also created a huge impact in Japan. In fact, the dubbed version of the Rajinikanth film ‘Muthu’ in 1998 created a great wave of interest in Japan and the consequent interest evinced by Japanese audiences in watching Tamil movies.

7. Conclusion

The above study shows the resemblance of the culture between India and Japan. The cross-cultural comparisons bring down the similarities between the two nations in various angles. However, all the traits may not have directly spread from India to

Japan, but one simply cannot deny the fact that the two cultures are in close proximity, which proves that there is a high chance that many of the cultural traits have been spread indirectly which can still be seen in the practice of Japanese culture.

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