

DIWALI IN YOKOHAMA 2010

Festival of lights celebrating India-Japan ties

By Ryuko Hira

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"The joy of encountering other cultures" and "humane empathy and resonance through exchange" are certainly the two most important aspects of any cultural exchange. The long process of building the foundation for today's India-Japan exchanges in the 21st century stretched over 1,200 years, beginning in the eighth century with the Kaigen Kuyo (eye opening ceremony) conducted by Indian priest Bodhisena at the huge statue of Lord Buddha in Nara's Todaiji temple.



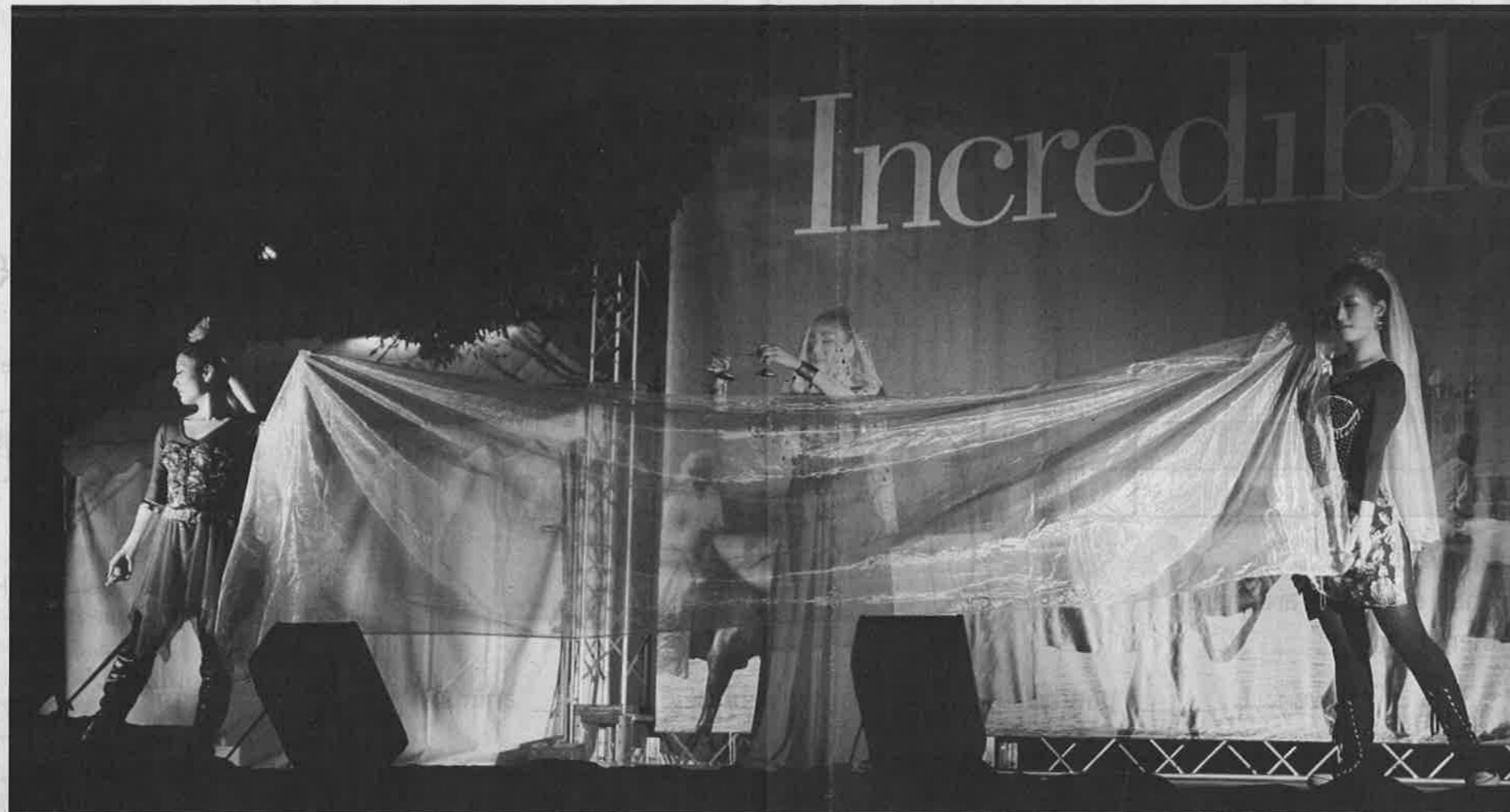
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Japan was able to build rich cultural foundations by taking Indian spiritual culture to its soil. Japan benefited from Indian influence not only through the introduction of Buddhism but more so by its effect on Japanese people's daily lives in a variety of aspects.

For example, the 50-syllable table of Japanese phonetics (hiragana) is linked to the basic plank of the phonetics table in the Indian language of Sanskrit. The Gion festival of Kyoto has its origin in India. A majority of Japanese gods actually originate in India. Of course, gods are a universal phenomenon, beyond nationality and borders. Indian cotton fabrics and dyeing techniques influenced the Japanese kasuri weaving procedure, while the high quality Nishijin Ori silk produced in Kyoto are a few examples of the generally unknown and unseen cultural bonds that enlighten and provide resources of higher wisdom.

Amid this 1,200-year period of cultural exchange, the Zaidan Hojin Indian Merchants Association of Yokohama was established in the 10th year of the Taisho era (1921), to deepen economic, social and cultural friendship with Japan. Today, our association serves as the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan with a history of 90 years. On this festival of friendship, we express our deep gratitude to Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress, the government and citizens of Japan for having extended their support and cooperation over nine decades, especially during the Great Kanto and Hanshin earthquakes.

Indian festivals are suffused with spirituality, marking the progress of each individual's march toward one's higher self. Happy Diwali is a universal greeting to celebrate the festival of lights.



A dance troupe gives a traditional Indian dance performance during Diwali in Yokohama 2009 at Yamashita Park.

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many objects although our eyes are closed. Who is the seer in that state and who is the experiencer of the dream? It is the Buddhi (intelligence) that is able to see things by its own luminosity (Tejas). In the Sushupti (deep sleep) state even the Buddhi is not present, but blissful feeling is experienced. Who is the experiencer of this bliss? That is the Atma (the In-dwelling Spirit). "I" am the Atma and the Atma is "I"—this is the truth that has to be recognised by everyone. It is the Atma that activates the Buddhi, which enables the eyes to perceive objects. The Atma is the truth and you are the Atma. It is when this truth is experienced, then alone can man realize the transcendental unity that subsumes everything.

The illumination of one's intellect by the in-dwelling light (spirit) bestows transcendental unity, which symbolizes this festival of lights "Deepavali" (Diwali).

deed. The Dharma of man is to speak the truth and adhere to righteousness. Man's Dharma is threefold. It relates to his body, his mind and his Atma (spirit). Good deeds, good thoughts and godly experiences of bliss are the expressions of this triple Dharma. The reference to the light that illuminates the three worlds should be understood in this way.

Significance of lighted lamps

A lamp has unique power, which is not possessed by any other object. It dispels darkness. For this reason, Bharatiyas (Indians) have always worshipped lighted lamps. Before commencing any auspicious or religious function, the ceremonial lamp is lit. Another notable

quality of the lamp is that the flame goes upward, the path of the Brahman (heaven). The sinful path leads downward. The light of the lamp, however, can only dispel the darkness outside but cannot remove the darkness that envelops the heart as a result of attachments and aversions carried from previous lives. Not all the blaze of the light, which filled Lanka when monkey god Hanuman set it on fire, could remove the darkness from Ravana's (demon) heart. Because his heart was filled with lust and hate, no light could penetrate it.

The lamp points to this fact. Whenever it may be placed, the flame goes upward yet never moves down. Likewise, the flame of wisdom (Jnana) leads one to a sublime level

through the path of righteousness.

Significance of Dipavali decoration

Dipavali (Diwali) is the day when old clothes are discarded and new ones are worn. Home and its precincts are swept clean, given a new look, and made to appear fresh and fine. Flowers are arranged in lovely designs in each room and the courtyard. Festoons of green leaves add charm to every door. But even while doing all this, attention has to be paid to the discarding of worn-out prejudices and adoption of new habits of love and mutual respect, the freshening of one's attitude toward one's kith and kin, brothers and sisters of all creeds and castes, the hanging of the festoons

Ambassador's greetings

I warmly welcome the initiative of the Indian Merchants Association of Yokohama in organizing this year's Diwali celebrations at Yamashita Park in Yokohama on Oct. 16.

This annual celebration of the Indian festival of lights has drawn increasing participation from both the Japanese and Indian communities every year. I am certain the joyous occasion of Diwali will once again be celebrated with enthusiasm at Yamashita Park, enhancing the friendly cultural ties between our peoples.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my Diwali greetings to the members of the Indian community here, as well as to all our friends in Japan. I also congratulate IMAY for once again making exemplary efforts to promote amity and goodwill between our countries.

H.K. Singh, Ambassador of India



H.K. Singh

of friendship and fraternity over the doorsill of the heart. This will make the festival really meaningful and fruitful.

The dark clouds of economic maturity have led Japan toward a spiritual renaissance in search of a perennial light, for which I recall a poem from the holy sage Sri Sathya Sathya Sai Baba.

Antara Jyoti Namō
Paramatma Jyoti Namō
Akhanda Jyoti Namō
Mama Jeevan Jyoti Namō
Antaryami Namō
Jai Satguru Sai namō

(Translation) Visualize and realize the infinite and supreme effulgence of the Atma (soul) in the heart. Realize the divine preceptor Lord Sai, who dwells in the heart

May the shining lamps of happy Diwali illuminate every reader.