

India independence day

Reflections on century of Indo-Japanese economic ties

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Sei Arao and Teiichi Sugita, who expressed their solidarity with Asia, formed the Society for Asian Revival (Ko-a-kai) in 1880. Wary of seeing Japan drifting along Western ways, they argued that even though Japan had modernized itself on the model of the West, it should remain an Asian power as Asia was where Japan lay geographically and historically.



The society even envisaged a federation consisting of Annam (present-day Vietnam), Burma (Myanmar), India, Korea and Siam (Thailand) — the Asian countries either subjugated or threatened by Britain, France and Russia. The news about Indian people forming a national organization (the Indian National Congress) and launching the struggle against the British lent support to their pro-Asian activities. Hailing the news, a fortnightly magazine, Nihonjin, started in 1888 by Setsurei Mi-

yake and Shigetaka Shiga, carried an article visualizing the possibility of India becoming “a new big independent country of Asia.”

The renewed interest in India resulted in the commencement of courses, led to the establishment of departments of Sanskrit, Buddhism, and Indian philosophy in the Japanese universities. But in the absence of any direct links with Indian scholars and academic institutions the Japanese had not only to rely on Western scholarship, but also study in European academic centers under the guidance of European scholars. Direct contact between the people of India and Japan began only with the arrival of an art historian, Tenshin Okakura, in Bengal in 1901.

The Indian political scenario was in turmoil at the time of Okakura's visit. A wave of despair and anger had engulfed the Indian people after their appeals for a representative government were turned down by the colonial masters. To express solidarity with the Indian cause, Okakura wrote a book, “The Awakening of Japan” (1904), in which he made a fervent appeal to the Indian youth to unite and work for the revival of Asia.

Prominent statesman Shig-

enobu Okuma set up a study circle (Indo Gakkai) on the campus of Waseda University to promote Indian studies and stimulate interest in Indian affairs. Despite constraints of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Okuma openly sympathized with the Indian cause and in several of his speeches urged the British to grant self-government to India.

The renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1907 had added coverage for India, thus making Japan a watchman of British interests in India and East Asia. This infuriated Shunmei Okawa, a graduate of Indian philosophy from the University of Tokyo's Department of Philosophy. After studying India's classical age, Okawa's inquisitive mind turned to contemporary India. The idealized image of India was shattered in 1913 when he read Henry Cotton's “New India”. In 1916, Okawa wrote several articles exposing the exploitative nature of British rule and denounced the presence of Great Britain as a source of misery in Asia. He remonstrated against the continuance of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which he saw as a deterrent for the Japanese in fostering better understanding with the Indians.

Therefore, he pleaded with his government to cultivate friendly relations with the Indians and help them in their struggle for freedom.

It has taken 100 years for India's self-reliance, which is nearing its goal of a developed nation. The India-Japan commercial partnership is rich with possibilities that will widely contribute to

enduring prosperity in Asia and beyond. The Indian chamber of Commerce and Industry (Tokyo) has served the Indian economic agenda for nine decades. On behalf of all members of ICCJ, I convey our appreciation to all who have contributed to India's cause. I am grateful to The Japan Times and its readers.