

What We Expect from India

by IWAKUNI Tetsundo

To most Japanese, India is emotionally quite accessible even though it is as far away as ten-thousand kilometers. This sentiment could be explained by the fact that India is the birthplace of Buddhism while almost eighty percent of Japanese are Buddhist. Thus a sense of affinity toward that country was nurtured here. In Japan, especially in the provinces, Shintoism and Buddhism co-exist in a peaceful manner, which is quite rare in the world. This is partly because the two teachings were politically syncretized in the past and partly because Buddhism somehow fit into the indigenous mentality of Japanese people. Japan is the only country in the world where the sum of the number of worshippers of two religions in the country amount to almost double the whole population. Our conventional wisdom dictates that there are far more Buddhists in India, the cradle of Buddhism, than there are in Japan. But this is far from the case.

There are only eight million Buddhists in India, accounting for only 0.8 per cent of the whole population, which is heavily outnumbered by those in Japan, accounting for 80 per cent of the population. Today's India is a minor country as far as Buddhist influence is concerned. However, not a few intellectuals and leaders of the country admire the values of Buddhism. I was truly impressed when I met some executives of Confederation of Indian Industry the other day, who made an impassioned appeal to us that they need Buddhism, which Japan long ago derived from India and has cherished ever since, to be returned back to India with "interest." Indeed, we expect much from India for its contribution to world peace. Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, on his visit to Japan in 1957, addressed us, stating that the stockpile of weapons of mass destruction owned by major powers endangers world peace, and collaboration for world peace must be called for. This clearly shows his determination to pursue disarmament and world peace.

This same India, however, later embarked on the development of nuclear weapons and is now a nuclear power. Fifty years after Nehru's visit to Japan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh delivered a speech on his visit here in 2008, in which he never once mentioned disarmament or abolition of nuclear weapons. In a meeting with Prime Minister Singh, I named nuclear weapons and human avarice as two major factors that pose a threat of annihilation to humankind. Then I pointed out that while the "Nuclear Club" is scrambling for the scarce resources of the world by force of its overwhelming military might, the "Avarice Club" composed of wealthy states and speculators is taking control of natural resources and energies through the market. A mere fact that starvation and unemployment, even in the absence of war, incite mass murder on a daily basis is proof enough to show that human avarice is far more destructive than nuclear weapons. Laws or treaties are, in this connection, no deterrent against human avarice.

I believe that nothing can deter human avarice except sound religious thought and ethical philosophy as are shown in such teachings of Buddhism as "Inexhaustible as our delusions are, I aspire to extinguish them all" or "Be content with what you have, rejoice in the way things are." Amid this once-in-a-century economic and financial crisis, there is again, I am afraid, a budding prospect of a once-in-a-century world war. It is exactly in this connection that we have much to expect from India, as a country that gave birth to one of the greatest intellectual assets in human history.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. IWAKUNI Tetsundo, Member of the House of Representatives (DPJ), which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on June 1, 2009.)