

Bridging South India and Kyushu, Japan



Sarasvati

INDIA & JAPAN 01

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Gentle light pouring into my “Moonlight Library.” Spread before me is a timeline of my life, from my seven-year-old self to the present. The warmth of pages and notebooks remains deeply precious, even after a quarter-century in the digital age.

Back to our Roots 原点回帰。

CONTENTS

1. Back to our Roots: From the Editor
2. Two Hometowns: Bridging Bangalore and Fukuoka
3. India in Fukuoka: Seiga Shonin, the Indian Monk
4. Sarasvati & Benzaiten: Soueiji Temple, Najima
5. Festivals: Hakata Gion Yamakasa and Ratha Yatra
6. The Launch of **Sarasvati**
7. A Personal Note from the Editor

Inaugural Issue

- ❖ **Sarasvati** is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, and the arts, and is the origin of the Japanese deity **Benzaiten**.
- ❖ The **Muses** are nine goddesses in Greek mythology who preside over the arts, literature, and sciences; they are the root of the words “music” and “museum.”
- ❖ Although the official name of the city is Bengaluru, this magazine uses “Bangalore,” which is more commonly known.

Back to our Roots



Najima Coast in Higashi-ku, Fukuoka.
As a child, I often came here just to watch the sea.

I launched *Sarasvati* on the 30th anniversary of living away from Japan, to create a space for subjective stories based on my own personal experiences.

Illuminating the Path Beneath My Feet

At eighteen, I left Fukuoka for university. Since then, although I returned regularly to visit my family, I rarely felt a deep attachment to my hometown. The nostalgic seashores and mountain landscapes of my childhood had changed with Japan's rapid economic growth, leaving little room for true nostalgia.

My perspective shifted around 2022, during my first visit home after the COVID-19 pandemic. As my mother grew older, I began spending several weeks to a month in Fukuoka, twice a year. Deciding to explore the local sights, I discovered the fascinating history and geography of Fukuoka, which had served as Japan's gateway to the world since ancient times. In my youth, my longing was always for foreign lands; I never thought to explore the charms of my own country, let alone my hometown. Yet, after traveling the world and spending decades living abroad, I had unconsciously developed the ability to view my homeland through an objective lens. Now, standing at the threshold of the second chapter of my life, I have arrived at a state of "returning to my roots."

The same holds true for Bangalore, where I relocated in 2005. Though I have lived here for twenty-one years, many places remain undiscovered. To overcome being blind to what is closest to me in both Fukuoka and Bangalore, I recently began studying and exploring their local histories. In doing so, I realized that these two cities share a number of similarities. Ultimately, I decided to channel this into my creative work, dedicating my efforts to bridging Fukuoka and Bangalore.



Forty years of planners, dating back to 1985, line a corner of my bookshelf.

Unlocking a Vast Archive of the Past

The "Moonlight Library" in my home, shown on the cover photo, is my favorite place. It houses books of various genres that I could never bring myself to discard despite many moves, alongside travel magazines I edited and wrote. Hand-written travel diaries and hundreds of postcards sent to my parents remain here without fading. Opening maps from around the world instantly revives my memories of travel.

On the other hand, a vast world of text exists on the internet, dating back to 2000 when I launched my website while living in New York. For the past twenty-six years, I have accumulated countless daily records. From time to time, I transferred these precious memories to a blog I named the "Deep-Sea Library." Yet, both the Moonlight and Deep-Sea libraries continue to sleep, largely unseen by anyone. In this era of rapid technological evolution, anyone can instantly broadcast words to the world. Text and videos grow shorter and shorter, and the swirling vortex of information makes my brain feel as though it is overheating. I felt a strong desire to create an information magazine just like the old days - unveiling even just the tip of the iceberg from my dual libraries, weaving past records with fresh perspectives.

"Fueki Ryuko" The Timeless and the Trendy

One of my guiding principles is **Fueki Ryuko**. Fueki means the unchanging "essence" that withstands the test of time, while Ryuko means the fluidity and change that adapts to the era. This phrase expresses the fundamental creative philosophy of haiku pursued by Matsuo Basho, the haiku master of the Edo period. The philosophy of Fueki Ryuko - which honors tradition and immutable principles while constantly seeking fresh expressions suited to the times - applies not only to haiku but also to art, culture, ethics, morals, and business. I intend to maintain a form of expression that preserves our unique human touch while striking a balance by fully utilizing the advantages of technology.

Sharing Bangalore with Japan, and Fukuoka with India

Introducing my “two hometowns”, uncovering their stories one at a time.



Kempegowda I (1510–1569), the founder of Bangalore. Cubbon Park, the State Vidhana Soudha and Department of Archaeology & Museums in central Bangalore. Photographed from Kingfisher Tower.



Kuroda Nagamasa (1568–1623), the founder of Fukuoka. The aerial view of Fukuoka City. Photographed from a flight bound for Seoul from Fukuoka. It takes less time than flying to Tokyo.

Bangalore represents South India, and Fukuoka represents Southern Japan (Kyushu). Despite both being historic, strategically vital, and immensely charming metropolises, Fukuoka remains lesser-known in India, and Bangalore in Japan. With a hopeful prayer that a direct flight will connect them in the near future (!), *Sarasvati* aims to foster friendship and cultural exchange between these two incredible cities.

Bangalore & Fukuoka: Shared Attributes of Two Cities

Geography Historic gateways of Southern Japan (Kyushu) and South India.

Environment Year-round pleasant weather (Bangalore) and top-tier livability (Fukuoka).

Tourism Abundant nature, scattered historic temples, and rich museums.

Airport Major international hubs, both currently expanding their facilities.

Gastronomy Cosmopolitan food cultures deeply rooted in a love for local alcohol.

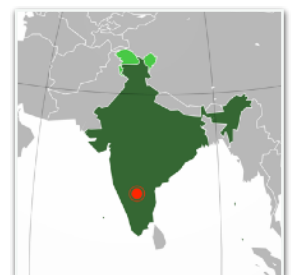
Shopping Vibrant downtowns blending traditional crafts with modern fashion.

Wellness Proximity to famous hot springs (Fukuoka) and Ayurveda retreats (Bangalore).

Crafts Living traditions of textiles, ceramics, and skilled woodworking.

Innovation Thriving tech and startup ecosystems powered by public-private synergy.

Academia Growing research institutions with vast potential for exchange and internships.



If Tokyo aligns with New Delhi, Osaka with Mumbai, and Kyoto with Chennai or Kolkata — don't you think Fukuoka and Bangalore have a similar alignment?



Did an Indian Monk Land in Fukuoka Before Buddhism's Official Arrival in Japan?

When I returned to Fukuoka this past April, I sought out locations connected to India. That was when the name of an Indian monk, Seiga Shonin (his Indian name unknown), caught my attention. He is recorded to have founded both Raizan Sennyoji Daihiouin (Raizan Kannon) in Itoshima City and Aburayama Kannon in Fukuoka City.

Legend dictates that Seiga Shonin, who hailed from Rajgir, arrived in Hakata by sea in the year 178, or by another account, 572. Looking inland from the shore, he saw five-colored clouds hovering over the mountains of Itoshima, with a divine Buddhist figure radiating light as if beckoning him. Guided by this vision, he set his sights on Mount Raizan. While Buddhism is “officially” recognized to have reached Japan in the mid-6th century (the 178 AD theory may be dubious) it still implies he brought Buddhist teachings directly from India to Kyushu at an exceptionally early era.

According to temple chronicles, Seiga Shonin dedicated his life to spreading Buddhism and introducing the culture

of tomyu (sacred oil lamps). He carved Buddhist statues at Raizan and opened the temple. Later, he founded seven temples in total. It is said he pressed oil from the camellia trees of Mount Aburayama to light these lamps - the very origin of the mountain's name, which translates to “Oil Mountain.”

Coincidentally, learning that my cousin frequently visits Raizan Sennyoji, I asked him to drive me there. The photograph above captures the Five Hundred Arhats alongside the statue of Seiga Shonin (bottom right). After spending a soul-cleansing afternoon at this serene temple, we stopped for lunch at the original headquarters of Maki no Udon, a renowned local noodle shop. Fukuoka, after all, is also celebrated as the birthplace of Japanese udon and soba noodles! Following our meal, we drove to Mount Aburayama in Minami-ku, Fukuoka City, to trace Seiga Shonin's remaining footprints. It was my first time returning to Aburayama in twenty-two years, since the day we cremated my father at the crematorium located here.



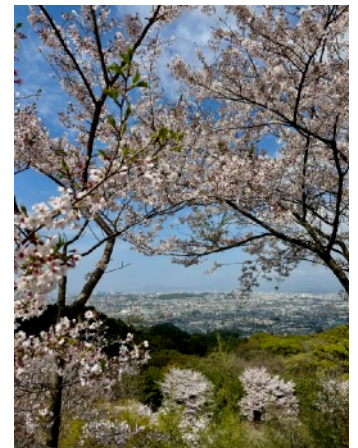
Raizan Sennyoji. Known for its breathtaking autumn foliage.



Beautiful dappled light on the sacred path of Aburayama.



Monument engraved with the name of Seiga Shonin.



Overlooking Fukuoka City and the Genkai Sea from Aburayama.

My Roots: Najima, Benzaiten, and her Origin in the Hindu Goddess Sarasvati

Gazing toward Foreign Lands beyond the Sea

Born in Arao City, Kumamoto Prefecture, I moved to Fukuoka City when I was one year old. At the time, the current ward system was not yet established, and the area was called Najima Shiomi, which no longer exists. As the name “Shiomi”, meaning “watching the tide”, suggests, walking just a few hundred meters from my house would bring me to the shores of Najima Coast.

However, from the beginning of the 1970s, the surrounding scenery transformed rapidly. Gravel roads were paved, hills were flattened, and the sea was reclaimed. In the blink of an eye, sterile apartment complexes lined the landscape, the sandy beaches vanished, and the coastline drifted away. Yet, as a child, I still visited Najima Coast often. Spotting washed-up debris marked with Korean Hangul characters, I would lose myself in thoughts of the “foreign lands” lying just beyond the horizon.

Najima is home to Najima Castle ruins and Najima Shrine, both essential to Fukuoka’s history. Kuroda Nagamasa, the first lord of the Fukuoka clan, temporarily used Najima Castle as his ruling seat before constructing Fukuoka Castle. Today, the site has been transformed into a scenic park with a commanding view.

The Benzaiten deity my family used to pray

At Soeiji Temple, adjacent to Najima Shrine, Benzaiten has been enshrined since the Heian period. Having left my hometown at eighteen, I rarely visited, but my parents would go to pray from time to time. Seated gracefully on a rock holding a biwa (Japanese lute), Benzaiten has been worshiped throughout Japan as the goddess of music, arts, learning, and eloquence.

Shortly after moving to India, I was astonished and deeply comforted to discover that the Hindu goddess Sarasvati was the origin of Benzaiten. A water goddess who personifies a sacred river, Sarasvati presides over music, knowledge, wisdom, and eloquence. Her four arms hold a stringed instrument called a veena, sacred scriptures, and prayer beads. Draped in a white sarree beside a swan or a white lotus, her graceful form perfectly mirrors that of Benzaiten.

When Benzaiten was first adopted into Buddhism, her name used the character for “talent”. However, since the Edo period, she became linked with fortune deities, leading to the widespread use of the character for “wealth”. Being born in the Year of the Snake - whose messenger is the white snake - I find her presence highly auspicious. Yet, I value talent over wealth, which is why I deliberately choose to write her name as “talent”.



A Hakata doll of Benzaiten (traditional unglazed pottery) purchased in Fukuoka in 2025. It was displayed in a shop window to celebrate the Year of the Snake. The painting in the background is Sarasvati, depicted by the father of modern Indian art, Raja Ravi Varma.



Najima Shrine once enshrined Benzaiten as well. However, following the separation of Shintoism and Buddhism during the Meiji Restoration, Benzaiten - who propagates Buddhist teachings - was separated from the shrine and moved to Soeiji Temple. Her mantra, “On Sora Sobateiei Sowaka,” is inscribed there in Sanskrit (originally, “Om Sarasvatyai Svaha” in Sanskrit).

Beyond Benzaiten, many deities of Indian origin, such as Daikokuten and Bishamonten, are deeply rooted in Japan. In future issues, I look forward to gradually introducing more stories of “India within Japan.”

Japan and India: Two strikingly similar Festivals symbolizing summer “Hakata Gion Yamakasa” and “Ratha Yatra”

This year's Ratha Yatra was held on July 16.



People in Fukuoka tend to possess a passionate, festival-loving spirit. In particular, the **Hakata Gion Yamakasa**, held annually from July 1st to 15th, brings the city's excitement to a peak. The roots of this festival trace back to 1241. It is said to have originated when Shoichi Kokushi, the founder of Jotenji Temple, was carried through the streets to sprinkle prayer water in order to eradicate a plague that was sweeping through Hakata.

Every year, massive, towering kazari-yamakasa (decorative floats) color various corners of the town. The climax arrives in the early hours of the final day, July 15th, with the Oiyama race. Men from Hakata's seven nagare (neighborhood districts) shoulder the kaki-yamakasa (magnificent floats standing about 10 meters tall and

weighing roughly one ton) and sprint fiercely through the streets. Yamakasa is a sacred Shinto ritual dedicated to Kushida Shrine, the grand guardian shrine of Hakata, and all events surrounding the festival are centered around it.

Meanwhile, in the state of Odisha, India, **Ratha Yatra**, one of Hinduism's largest chariot festivals is held for just over a week between June and July. Dating back to around the 10th century, holy deities are placed upon colossal wooden chariots, which crowds pull together in a powerful show of unity. From the overwhelming visual impact and roaring chants to the summer prayers for chasing away epidemics and bad fortune, both traditions beautifully embody the preservation of heritage and the unbreakable bond of the local community.



Hakata Gion Yamakasa is a sacred ritual of Kushida Shrine.



The Yamakasa floats at Kushida Shrine can be viewed all year round.



Handwoven Hakata-ori textile tapestry with an Oiyama motif.

Honoring Creativity, Action, and Handicrafts

My career began as a travel magazine editor and writer. This journey eventually led to launching my own business in New York and publishing a magazine.

Tokyo: Starting as a Travel Editor and Writer

Dreaming of becoming a high school Japanese teacher, I studied in Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi. However, a one-month homestay on the US West Coast during my sophomore year turned my vision upside down. Despite my poor English, I developed a strong desire for international reporting. Upon graduating in 1988, I joined a Tokyo editorial production company creating overseas travel magazines.

The chaotic, smoke-filled office was buried under books and reference materials. With word processors not yet widespread, all manuscripts were hand-written. Producing guidebooks for major travel agencies, I mastered the analog editorial process - from pagination and photo selection to print preparation - simply by watching my seniors. Though the labor was grueling, it thoroughly drilled the fundamentals of travel editing into me. Over the next two and a half years, I covered Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Spain, and domestic destinations.

Driven by Wanderlust: My Twenties on the Road

I later moved to a newly founded advertising agency to edit a monthly magazine for a major oil company. In an era without the internet, information gathering required sheer footwork. We drove across changing borders: from West to East Germany, Belgium to the Netherlands, and France to Spain. Traveling by car as global ideologies shifted during the Soviet Union's Perestroika was a profound experience. I also spent my vacations backpacking through Mongolia and Asia. After another two and a half years, I went independent as a freelance writer and editor, at age twenty-seven.



Home office in Upper West Side, New York. (1999)

New York: Founding a Publishing Company

When I went independent, I vowed to work nine months each year and spend the remaining three traveling abroad. Following through, I backpacked across Europe the first year, and studied English in the UK the second. Realizing three months wasn't enough, I flew to New York in 1996 for a one-year language program, exactly thirty years ago.

Stepping onto the streets of Manhattan, I felt a powerful magnetic pull. Determined to live there, I quit school within months to join a local Japanese publishing firm. Soon, longing to go independent in the US, I conceived a bold strategy: founding my own company, Muse Publishing, Inc. Navigating a path with no precedents through intense trial and error, I secured my work-visa at the end of 1997. By January 1998, I officially launched my independent career in New York.

Publishing the Freepaper, "muse new york"

This was the dawn of desktop publishing. Armed with a Power Macintosh 8600 - which was an real struggle just to configure for a Japanese environment - I began creating Japanese media. To pay my own salary, I pitched hard, taking on projects of all sizes. As a result, steady work began coming in, little by little.

In February 1999, as proof of self-actualization, I launched the quarterly Japanese magazine *muse new york*. I managed every single aspect alone: planning, reporting, photography, editing, printing, and even distributing 10,000 copies. It was a challenge made possible only by my rigorous training in Tokyo. Today, *muse new york* and *muse washington DC* still sit on my bookshelf, their pages unfaded. A quarter-century later, the deep desire to create such a medium once again is the very concrete catalyst behind the launch of *Sarasvati*.



muse new york and
muse Washington DC (1999-2005)



July 2026 marks a milestone, bringing together our 30th Anniversary of meeting and our Silver Wedding Anniversary.

Meeting in Manhattan on Tanabata Night, 1996

In April 1996, I flew to New York for a one-year language program. My daily routine was studying at the Starbucks inside Barnes & Noble, opposite Lincoln Center on Broadway.

A few months later, on Sunday evening, July 7th - the night of the Tanabata Star Festival - the cafe was packed. Clutching my latte, I scanned the crowded room and spotted a single empty chair. Weaving through the tables, I asked, "May I sit here?" The person occupying that table was my future husband.

In my youth, I believed life was carved out by our own will. Yet, as the years pass, I increasingly feel as though we travel a pre-destined path. This journey from the past into the future is beautifully colored by go-en (mystical bonds of fate). Among them is my deep connection with India, a destiny almost entrusted to me by my ancestors. Bit by bit, I look forward to weaving these stories into the pages of *Sarasvati*.

July 2001: My First trip to India and a Wedding

Five years after we met, in July, I flew to my husband's hometown, New Delhi, for the first time. I had no concept of what an Indian wedding entailed. Back then, internet information was scarce, and personal accounts were few. When I questioned my husband, who had left India at eighteen, he humorously replied, "I don't really know either - it's my first time getting married, too!"

I met up with my parents and sister's family from Fukuoka at Delhi Airport. In the stifling humidity of July - a season far from ideal for weddings - we embarked on days of continuous ceremonial rituals. While I had met my husband's family in the US, this was the first formal gathering between our two families. Diving into the wedding without any prior knowledge of Indian customs, I had no clue about traditions. My Japanese family simply accepted the overwhelming hospitality of my in-laws.

Looking back, our utter ignorance was reckless, yet it remains a comical, vividly cherished memory.



Tanabata (The Star Festival) Celebrated on July 7th, Tanabata stems from the legend of two star-crossed lovers, Orihime and Hikoboshi. Separated by the Milky Way for neglecting their duties, they are allowed to meet just once a year on this night, aided by magpies forming a bridge. The festival spread widely during the Edo period, establishing the enduring tradition of hanging handwritten wishes on bamboo branches.

Editor's Note 編集後記



Returning to My Beginnings: Becoming an Editor Once Again

Thank you for reading the inaugural issue of *Sarasvati*. While I regularly share photographs and writings on social media, shaping them into this magazine format made me feel as though I was confronting each word with greater care than usual. It brings back memories of when I used to publish *muse new york*, filling me with a sense of nostalgia that feels remarkably fresh. I am deeply grateful to return to a form of

expression I thought I had left behind forever.

Countless stories and topics continue to well up in my mind. Following my heart, I intend to sustain this journey over the long term.

Sarasvati is produced in both Japanese and English; please feel free to share it with those around you.

July 18, 2026

On our Silver Wedding Anniversary.

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