

Sarasvati

INDIA & JAPAN 02

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August 2026



Mount Arunachala in Tamil Nadu, revered as an incarnation of Lord Shiva, one of Hinduism's principal deities. A morning scene on August 29, 2023. While walking barefoot up the stone-paved path of Arunachala, I came across a stonemason setting up his roadside stall. The statue on the left is a palm-sized Nataraja, carved from a piece of stone from the holy mountain itself. Nataraja, meaning "Lord of the Dance," is another name for Shiva, symbolizing cosmic rhythm, the cycle of life, as well as creation and destruction.

The Unexpected Bond Between Japan and India Through War

Destruction and Rebirth

破壊と再生の8月。

- ❖ *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."





Destruction and Rebirth

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From the Editor 8月に思うこと

August, Swirling with History

There is a theory called the "80-Year Cycle of History." It suggests that as generations that experienced major crises or wars pass away, history repeats itself. History is a living thing: changing with who tells it and how it is interpreted; it is never absolute. Sifting information and discerning the truth is no easy task. Yet, I believe that understanding human tragedy allows us to choose a path that avoids past mistakes.

For many Japanese, August reawakens memories of war. In elementary school, we had summer peace education days — watching films, singing songs about the sorrow of Hiroshima, and hearing survivor stories. During my sixth-grade trip to the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, I was so overwhelmed by the exhibits that I kept my eyes on the floor, following my friend's feet. Reading *Barefoot Gen*, a cartoon story of Hiroshima, was equally heavy. Peace education is challenging, but sharing these stories remains essential.

This second issue of *Sarasvati* addresses a heavy theme. Japan and India share a rich history, particularly around WWII. Before moving to India, I knew little about the country. Yet through market research, writing, seminars, interviews, and daily blogging over the years, I have continually explored its past. This issue condenses August-related topics from those extensive records.

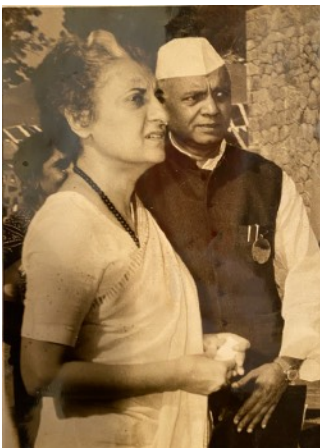
When I first visited Mumbai in 2004, I walked into

Yazdani Bakery in Fort, drawn by the smell of freshly baked bread. Learning I was Japanese, the friendly elderly owner said with heartfelt empathy, "Hiroshima and Nagasaki... that was so tragic." I was bewildered, as no one abroad had ever said such a thing to me before. Since then, several other Indian friends and acquaintances have expressed similar sorrow.

Why do many Indians feel such a warm connection to Japan? Through daily conversations and researching Japan - India relations dating back to the Meiji era, I have uncovered countless ties, one connection leading unexpectedly to another. Learning how my own ancestors connected to India — and my husband's to Japan — greatly stimulates my personal curiosity.

Over the years, my husband's uncle Ranjit Puri shared family histories with me — including the fact that his own uncle died in the Japanese attack on Kota Bharu in the Malay Peninsula. These vivid accounts, along with the lived experiences of my husband's mother, uncles, and grandparents during the turmoil of the 1947 Partition, are deeply etched into my heart.

I am not a historian, so I take great care to avoid factual errors and ensure accuracy. Having lived in Japan, the US, and India, and traveled the world, I strive to avoid specific ideologies. I hope these records foster greater mutual understanding between India and Japan.



Indira Gandhi with my husband's maternal grandfather, DD Puri, who was a businessman and politician.



My husband's maternal uncle, Ranjit Puri, who lives in Delhi, telling me the family history. (2022)



Gold jewelry from my husband's maternal grandmother, crossing borders to me.



Yazdani Bakery in Mumbai: This building housed a Japanese bank before World War II. (2022)

August 15: Why Japan's End of War and India's Independence Share the Same Date?



An Encounter with Historian Ramachandra Guha

August 15 marks both Japan's Day of the End of the War and India's Independence Day. For a long time, I assumed it was mere coincidence that India achieved independence from British rule on that exact date in 1947, just two years after Japan's defeat. However, through a single book, I learned that this date had been deliberately chosen.

In 2007, I had the privilege of meeting the prominent Indian historian Ramachandra Guha at a party, where guests were presented with copies of his newly published, voluminous book, *India After Gandhi*. I happened to recount this episode on my blog.

Five years later, in February 2012, I received an email from the book's translator, Mr. Hiroshi Sato. He had read my blog post and shared that the Japanese edition had just been published in two volumes. Moved by this, I immediately ordered the translation from Amazon Japan.

The Story Behind the Choice of August 15

The translation is filled with vivid accounts of the founding of the Republic of India. One passage in particular left me in absolute awe:

"Every year after 1930, Congress-minded Indians celebrated 26 January as Independence Day. However, when the British finally left the subcontinent, they chose to hand over power on 15 August 1947. This date was selected by the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, as it was the second anniversary of Japanese surrender to the Allied Forces in the Second World War. He, and the politicians waiting to take office, were unwilling to delay until the date some others would have preferred – 26 January 1948. So freedom finally came on a day that resonated with imperial pride rather than nationalist sentiment."

To fully grasp this background, one need to understand the era's circumstances. Forced to relinquish its colonial empire after World War II, Britain dispatched Lord Louis Mountbatten to India in March 1947 as the final Viceroy to oversee the transfer of power.

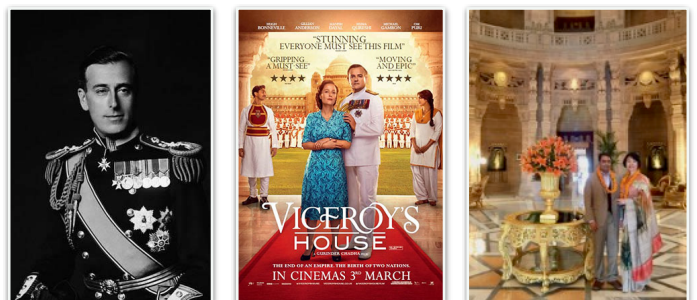
Lord Mountbatten was well known for his deep anti-Japanese hostility, forged while commanding forces on the Burma Front. Late in life, he even explicitly instructed in his will that no Japanese attendees be invited to his funeral. In his haste to finalize independence, he likely selected August 15 to align the occasion with Japan's surrender — the crowning glory of his military career.

The Congress Party mentioned earlier is the Indian National Congress. Originally established under British initiative in 1885 as a "safety valve" to absorb growing anti-British sentiment, it unexpectedly transformed over time into the very movement that led India to self-rule.

Overlapping histories: a twist of fate

When I asked my husband's uncle, Ranjit Puri, about those days, I mentioned Mountbatten bringing forward the date of independence to August 15 and asked what the atmosphere was like. He recalled that unrest was already stirring in Lahore by early 1947, forcing the British to expedite their departure. Exploring historical records further, I learned that escalating religious riots sparked fears that any delay would plunge the nation into an uncontrollable civil war. Accounts even recall that during a press conference on June 4, 1947, when pressed for an exact date, Mountbatten spontaneously answered "August 15" — the day of Japan's surrender flashing across his mind as his career's pinnacle.

While various factors contributed to this decision and local tensions were critical, the fact remains: India's Independence Day is inextricably linked to Japan's history.



From left to right: A portrait of Lord Mountbatten, known to be highly self-conscious about his appearance in photographs; the movie *Viceroy's House* (2017), depicting the events of the era; and *Umaid Bhawan Palace* in Jodhpur, a filming location for the movie (2017).

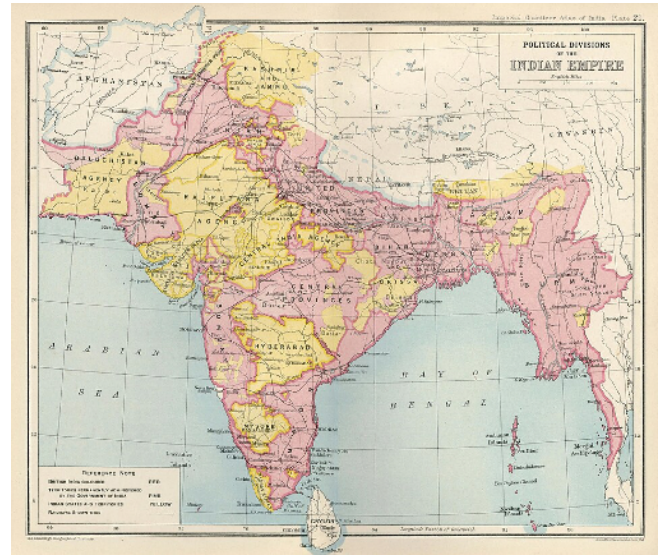
Why Did the Indian Subcontinent, Once the Wealthiest Empire, Decline Under British Rule and Suffer Partition?

Unlike Japan, whose borders are shielded by the sea, the Indian subcontinent resembles a funnel, historically absorbing people and goods from both east and west. Positioned at the crossroads of the Silk Road and maritime trade routes, it has welcomed diverse cultures since ancient times. Beyond native faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, religions like Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism flowed in, fostering a unique mosaic of traditions.

Prior to British rule, the subcontinent was governed by the Mughal Empire (1526–1858). At its 17th-century zenith, the empire generated approximately 25% of global GDP as the world's largest economy. It exported fine textiles, spices, and gems across Europe, the Middle East, and China, drawing immense riches of gold and silver in return. The Taj Mahal remains a shining symbol of that vast wealth.

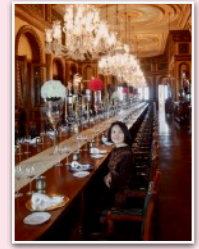
Following Emperor Aurangzeb's death in 1707, succession struggles fractured Mughal authority into over 500 semi-independent princely states. Seizing upon this instability, Britain orchestrated a strategy of “divide and rule.” Key trading hubs such as Bengal, Bombay, and Madras formed “British India” under direct colonial administration (pink areas on the map). Meanwhile, semi-independent princely states (yellow areas on the map) — such as Hyderabad under its Nizam, and Mysore, Rajputana, and others under their Maharajas — coexisted with Portuguese and French enclaves, forming a complex patchwork of governance.

Beginning with the Battle of Plassey in 1757, nearly 190 years of British rule systematically dismantled India's economy, dropping its global GDP share from 25% to roughly 3%. Local industries were ruined, famines struck, and communal tensions were stoked. The tragic climax arrived on August 15, 1947, with Partition — splitting the land along religious lines into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, igniting rivalries that persist today.



Map of the political divisions of British India, published in the ‘Imperial Gazetteer of India’ (1931)

Taj Falaknuma Palace: Reborn Splendor



Once the world's sole diamond source, the Princely State of Hyderabad — ruled by a Muslim sovereign — boasted the largest territory, population, and immense wealth among all princely states. Today, the **Taj Falaknuma Palace** in Hyderabad stands as a testament to that legacy. After falling into ruin following the kingdom's dissolution, the palace was meticulously restored over ten years by the Taj Hotels group and reborn in 2010 as an ultra-luxury heritage hotel.

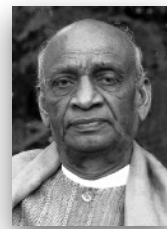
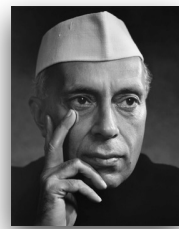
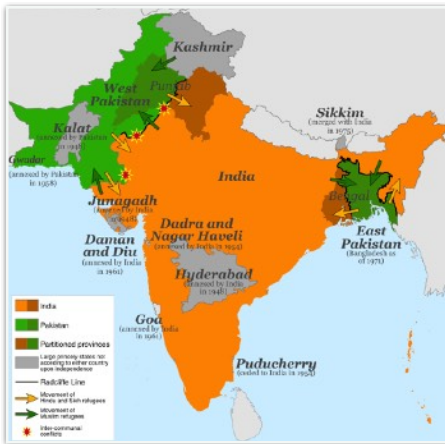


The Wagah Border, located west of Amritsar, is a major land crossing between India and Pakistan. Every day before sunset, a flag-lowering ceremony is held. Facing the Pakistani crowd directly across the line, watching soldiers from both sides exchange handshakes brings an indescribable feeling about the reality of Partition. (November 2019)

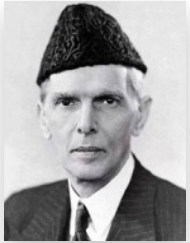


The Partition Museum in New Delhi also offers a glimpse into the countless personal tragedies of those forced from their homes by the division of two nations. (January 2024)

Understanding the Story Behind the India-Pakistan Partition

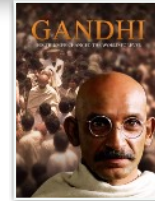
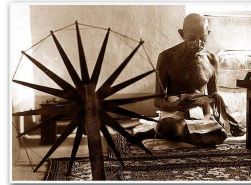


Nehru (left) and Patel (right)



Jinnah, Pakistan's first Governor-General

Partition of India 1947 by Planemad / CC BY-SA 3.0



Top right: The masterpiece film **Gandhi** (1982), featuring Ben Kingsley's brilliant performance.



Swaraj Flag adopted by the Congress in 1931

The Role of the Indian National Congress (INC)

British control over the Indian subcontinent began with the Battle of Plassey in 1757, but Indians did not passively accept this oppression. The Indian Rebellion in 1857 sparked a phased national resistance. In 1885, the Indian National Congress (INC) was established, becoming the core of the independence struggle. Following the 1905 Bengal Partition — a British strategy to divide the population — momentum grew behind **Swadeshi** (use of Indian goods) and **Swaraj** (self-rule). Boycotting British goods and spinning native yarn later became key pillars of Mahatma Gandhi's platform.

Gandhi, a lawyer who had championed human rights in South Africa, returned to India in 1915. After traveling the country for several years to understand rural realities, he joined the Congress and transformed it from an elite intellectual group into a mass movement.

At the core of his strategy were nonviolent movements grounded in **ahimsa** and **satyagraha**, principles rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. To embody **Swadeshi**, Gandhi wore hand-spun cotton cloth (**khadi**). He further mobilized the public through actions like the 380-kilometer **Salt March** in 1930, defying the British salt monopoly.

Within the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru — later India's first prime minister — served as Gandhi's right-hand man. Vallabhbhai Patel integrated over 500 princely states into the Indian Union through diplomacy and pressure. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali Jinnah left the Congress over concerns that Muslims would be marginalized in a Hindu-majority state, later leading the All-India Muslim League to found Pakistan. Radical leader Subhas Chandra Bose also broke away, opposing Gandhi's nonviolent line to pursue armed struggle.

A Border Drawn in 5 Weeks and Endless Tragedy

Exhausted by World War II, Britain decided to transfer power to India. In March 1947, Louis Mountbatten arrived as the final Viceroy. His mission was to execute a smooth transition, but negotiations among Mountbatten, Jinnah, and the Congress leaders over a unified versus partitioned India failed amid escalating interfaith riots. Partition was declared, and Mountbatten drastically advanced the timeline, setting August 15 as Independence Day and launching a rushed process.

Defining the border posed the greatest challenge. British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe was appointed to draw the line. Unfamiliar with India's complex demographics, he drafted the **Radcliffe Line** on a map in just five weeks. Drawn without adequate field surveys or deliberation, the boundary severely disrupted Hindu, Muslim, and even Sikh communities alike.

Pakistan gained independence on August 14, 1947, followed by India on August 15. On the eve of independence, Gandhi reflected, *"From tomorrow we shall be delivered from the bondage of British rule. But from midnight today, India will be partitioned too. While, therefore, tomorrow will be a day of rejoicing, it will be a day of sorrow as well."* The border announcement sparked massive chaos, forcing over 10 million people across Punjab and Bengal to migrate. Violent clashes during the exodus claimed over a million lives.

Originally, Pakistan included East Pakistan as an enclave across India, which broke away as Bangladesh in 1971 following resistance to West Pakistani political dominance. Painful memories endure for families that crossed the border, including my husband's family. Our family hailed from Lahore, Punjab, and migrated to India, after Lahore was left in Pakistan.

Revolutionaries Seeking Indian Independence in Alliance with Japan — Subhas Chandra Bose and the Armed Struggle



A December 1943 issue of *Taiyo* (The Sun), a wartime propaganda magazine published by Asahi Shimbun during the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere era, purchased from an antique dealer in Bangalore in 2022. This issue covers the Greater East Asia Conference held in November 1943, featuring Subhas Chandra Bose as the representative of the Provisional Government of Free India alongside Prime Minister Hideki Tojo and other leaders.

The Forgotten Army (2020), an Amazon Original series portraying the Indian National Army

Seeking Independence Through Armed Force

While Mahatma Gandhi sought peaceful negotiations with the British, Subhas Chandra Bose advocated armed force. Following a split over strategy, Bose left the Indian National Congress and fled the country. He first headed to Nazi Germany and Italy, expecting Britain's enemies to support India's independence, but found little support. Ultimately, he placed his hopes on Japan, which was waging a fierce war against the British Empire in Asia, and decided to travel there.

In April 1943, Bose boarded a German submarine U180 and left Europe in secrecy. After a perilous transfer to a Japanese submarine I-29 in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar, he arrived in Tokyo in May. The following month, Bose met Prime Minister Hideki Tojo and secured a commitment of full support for India's independence.

Indian Activists and Fukuoka's "Genyosha"

Several Indian independence activists were already active in Japan. Figures like Rash Behari Bose, exiled in 1915, and A.M. Nair, arriving in 1928, laid the groundwork for the Provisional Government of Free India. (Both are also famous for introducing authentic Indian curry to Japan!) Their operations were backed by *Genyosha*, a private organization supporting Asian revolutionaries, with its founder Mitsuru Toyama providing a vital lifeline.

Genyosha was based in my hometown, Fukuoka, and my paternal grandfather had a connection with Mitsuru Toyama. A hanging scroll with Toyama's calligraphy, once in my childhood home, now in our home in Bangalore.

Subhas Chandra Bose's arrival revitalized the stagnating movement. In July 1943, he became Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army (INA), inspiring Indians across Asia with the rallying cry *Chalo Delhi*.

Deep Ties: The INA and Free India Government

In October 1943, Subhas Chandra Bose declared the establishment of the Provisional Government of Free India in Singapore and assumed command of the INA. At the Greater East Asia Conference held in Tokyo that November (pictured above), Prime Minister Tojo announced the transfer of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Provisional Government. This became the government's first territory under international law.

Meanwhile, before Pearl Harbor in December 8th 1941, the Malayan Campaign was underway in Southeast Asia. Through the efforts of Major Iwaichi Fujiwara — head of the Japanese Army's "F-Kikan" intelligence unit — and Captain Mohan Singh, the INA was already taking shape. It was composed primarily of Indian soldiers from the British Indian Army who had become prisoners of war.

The Imphal Campaign, Defeat, and Bose's Death

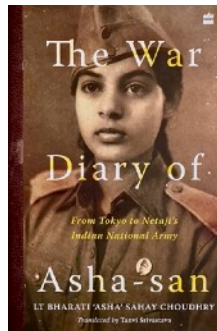
In 1944, Japanese forces and the INA launched a joint operation from Burma (Myanmar) toward India: the Imphal Campaign. However, risky supply lines and intense monsoon rains led to heavy losses from starvation and disease, resulting in catastrophic failure. Countless Japanese and Indian soldiers met tragic deaths. After the atomic bombings, Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945.

With Japan's defeat cutting off military options, Bose looked to the anti-British Soviet Union. En route to the USSR via Songshan Airport in Taipei, he died in a plane crash on August 18, 1945, before seeing an independent India. His ashes were brought to Tokyo via Gannosu Airfield in Fukuoka. However, rumors of his survival persisted for decades. It was only in 2017 that India's Ministry of Home Affairs officially concluded that Bose died in the Taiwan crash on August 18, 1945.

Asako, a Japanese-Born INA Female Fighter, and Renkoji Temple — Resting Place of Subhas Chandra Bose



With Asako and Her Family in Bangalore (February 2022)



In 2023, the English edition of *The War Diary of Asha-san* was translated by writer Tanvi Srivastava, Asako's granddaughter-in-law. On the right is Ryohei Kasai's *Asako, the Indian Independence Fighter*.

Meeting Asako (Asha) and Her Family

As I write this on August 12, 2026, it marks the first anniversary of the passing of Asako, who lived a full life to the age of 97. I first learned of her through Ryohei Kasai's book *Asako, the Indian Independence Fighter* (2016). Asako was born in 1928 in Kobe, Japan, to Anand Mohan Sahay, an independence activist from Bihar, and Sati Sen from Bengal. Her parents were close to Netaji (Subhas Chandra Bose), whom Asako also deeply revered.

When Netaji formed the *Rani of Jhansi Regiment* — the women's regiment of the INA — in Singapore, Asako longed to join. In May 1945, upon turning 17, she enlisted and began training. However, Japan surrendered just a few months later. After the war ended while she was in Bangkok, she finally stepped foot in her motherland, India (Kolkata), in August 1946.

Starting in 2022, I was fortunate to meet Asako and her family several times. While she usually lived in Patna, Bihar, with her son and his wife, she visited her grandchild's family in Bangalore almost every year.

Later, based on *Asha's Diary* — which she wrote in Japanese as a teenager — and *Asako: An Independence Fighter for India*, I created a 30-minute video for YouTube. Hearing Asako's own voice vividly conveys what Japan and India were like back then. Please feel free to watch the video via the link below.

Netaji's Ashes at Renkoji Temple in Tokyo

After Netaji died in a Taipei plane crash on August 18, 1945, his ashes were cremated locally and brought to Japan by companion Colonel Habib ur Rahman. Finding a temple for his funeral proved difficult, during which time Asako's mother, Sati, guarded the ashes. On September 14, 1945, Chief Priest Mochizuki of Renkoji — a Nichiren temple in Koenji, Tokyo — agreed to hold the service. Since then, Indian dignitaries including Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee have visited to pay respects. Yet to this day, his ashes have not returned to India.

Meanwhile, a military sword associated with Bose did make it back. Presented to him during his 1943 Japan visit by supporters in Fukuoka through the mediation of Mitsuru Toyama, it was returned to India in 1967 by former Major General Iwaichi Fujiwara and others. It is now on permanent display at Netaji Bhawan, Bose's former residence turned memorial museum in Kolkata.



I met Ryohei Kasai (left) and Nikkei journalist Satoshi Iwaki (right), who had previously interviewed Asako, in Tokyo. That day, I visited Renkoji Temple, Koenji. (June 2022)

YOUTUBE/ STUDIO MUSE <https://x.gd/kHpVE>



Coincidentally, on the very day I am writing this article, *The Times of India* featured a piece on Subhas Chandra Bose. It reported that his Germany-based daughter, Anita Pfaff — born to Bose and his Austrian wife — urged the Indian government to return his ashes from Renkoji Temple.

Legal Principles Across Eras: Can Victors Judge the Vanquished? Justice Pal of India and His Call for Full Acquittal at the Tokyo Trial



Located in Chiyoda, Tokyo, **Yasukuni Shrine** honors the war dead who lost their lives from the late Edo period through World War II. During a brief visit to Japan in 2013, I paid my respects there and also visited the Yushukan, situated on the shrine grounds. As Japan's oldest military and historical museum, it displays relics of the enshrined war dead alongside military equipment. The photograph shows the monument dedicated to Justice Pal near the entrance of the **Yushukan**.



A Trial to Judge Japan After World War II

I first learned of Justice Pal shortly after moving to India. That discovery prompted me to study the background of the **Tokyo Trial** (the International Military Tribunal for the Far East). Held from 1946 to 1948 following World War II, the trial was convened by the Allied powers to hold Japan accountable for its wartime actions. Judges gathered from 11 victorious nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, China, the Soviet Union, Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, India, and the Philippines.

The trial's central focus was the charge of **"crimes against peace,"** a concept first applied at the Nuremberg trials to judge Nazi Germany. For the first time in history, international law treated war itself as a crime and sought to hold individual national leaders personally accountable. Inside the judicial chambers, opinions conflicted sharply. A trial initially expected to wrap up quickly descended into prolonged deadlock. Ultimately, key leaders (Class-A war criminals), including former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, were convicted. They were imprisoned at Sugamo Prison in Toshima, Tokyo, where the execution of the seven sentenced to death also took place.

Why India's Justice Pal maintained Full Acquittal

Representing India at the tribunal was jurist Justice Radhabinod Pal. Among the 11 judges, he stood alone in insisting on the acquittal of all defendants. Yet he was by no means condoning Japan's acts of war or violence. What he challenged was the fundamental unfairness of victorious powers fabricating ex post facto laws after the war to unilaterally judge a defeated nation. He also fiercely condemned the United States for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"When time shall have softened passion and prejudice, when Reason shall have stripped the mask from misrepresentation, then Justice, holding evenly her scales, will require much of past censure and praise to change places."

These words, inscribed on the monument, form the concluding passage of Justice Pal's dissenting opinion at the Tokyo Trial (a quote from Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy during the American Civil War.)

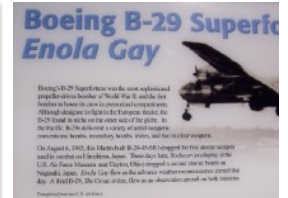
Netflix's TOKYO TRIAL (2016)

Produced by NHK a decade ago, this four-part co-production avoids political bias with a raw, documentary feel. Justice Pal is played by the late Irrfan Khan, one of my favorite actors. His commanding performance, combined with authentic archival footage, gives the series a strong sense of realism. Capturing the tension behind the tribunal, it is streaming on Netflix.



On the day I saw the Boeing B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay: The Bomber That Dropped the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb

In February 2004, while living in Washington, D.C., I visited the newly opened Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum annex near Dulles Airport to see the Enola Gay. It was no replica, but the actual B-29 bomber that dropped the **Little Boy** atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.



On August 6, 1945, that large, sleek, beautiful aircraft flew through the clear blue sky, reflecting the morning sun. At 8:15 am, its bomb bay opened over Hiroshima, releasing a new type of atomic bomb named **Little Boy**. Detonating about 600 meters above the ground, it burned countless human lives. The living hell of Hiroshima that morning was beyond comprehension here in the museum.

On a cold morning, 22 years ago, I drove to Virginia to visit the newly opened Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum annex. I approached the metal-clad building set against the clear blue sky, bracing myself for what lay inside. My sole purpose was to face the Enola Gay —the aircraft that had snuffed out over a hundred thousand lives in a single flash. Picking up a brochure at the entrance desk, I stepped into the vast exhibition hall, where the World War II section stood directly ahead.

A large silver bomber immediately drew attention. A big “R” was marked on its tail fin, with the number “82” and an insignia star on its fuselage. Surrounding it below were aircraft from Japan and Nazi Germany.

After reading an informational panel about the U.S. entry into World War II following Pearl Harbor, I examined a Japanese aircraft. The Ohka, built with small wings and no landing gear for a one-way mission, looked more like a missile than an airplane. A panel noted that nearly 4,000 pilots died in these missions by the end of the war.

Wondering which aircraft was the Enola Gay, I walked around the section and gasped. Near the cockpit of that very first silver bomber I had seen were the words **ENOLA GAY**.

The Boeing B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay was neither hideous nor repulsive; it was magnificent and beautiful. The panel described what an effective bomber this aircraft had been in the Pacific War. It also noted that on August 6, 1945, it dropped the first nuclear weapon on Hiroshima; three days later, a same-model bomber named **Bockscar** dropped the second—the **Fat Man** — on Nagasaki and is now displayed near Dayton, Ohio.

I approached the Enola Gay and looked up — a lightweight, sturdy bomber wrapped in duralumin. I stared at its fuselage. It felt surreal that those doors opened to drop the atomic bomb. Dazed, I went upstairs to view the cockpit up close. Having seen the Enola Gay, nothing else mattered. I walked toward the exit, barely glancing at commercial planes — an Air France Concorde, an old FedEx cargo, and a Pan Am aircraft. Passing the gift shop, I noticed models of the Enola Gay for sale.

An airplane bears no guilt. Seeing it firsthand made that simple truth sink in. Guilt is created by humans; it lies within humanity itself.

At the time, displaying the Enola Gay sparked controversy in the United States. Curators wishing to convey the devastation clashed with veterans’ organizations and Congress, who argued the bomb ended the war. Consequently, all planned exhibits regarding the suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were canceled — drawing strong disappointment and protests from Japanese survivors who viewed it as downplaying the tragedy. Now, as I unearth these past records to polish my writing and view images of the bomber, the confusion of that day returns vividly. Even now, I still cannot quite put into words my feelings about that exhibit.

Prime Minister Nehru receives Letters from Japanese Children, Gifting them “Indira” — an Elephant from Karnataka.



Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi meeting the elephant Indira at Ueno Zoo (October 1957)

An Elephant Gifted upon Children’s Request

Many Japanese people are familiar with the picture book *Faithful Elephants*, which tells the tragic story of elephants at Ueno Zoo during World War II. In 1943, following an order from the Governor of Tokyo to prevent dangerous animals from escaping during air raids, the zoo’s animals were put down. While lions, bears, and tigers were poisoned, the three elephants refused to eat poisoned food and were starved to death. As the elephants performed tricks while begging for food, the zookeepers felt immense grief and anger. Some believe this mass culling was driven by government propaganda intended to incite war fervor and a sense of crisis among the public.

Eventually, Japan was defeated. As hope began to return amid hardships, over 1,000 Tokyo children pooled their pocket money to buy stamps and sent letters to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Their message was a simple plea: please send an elephant to a Japanese zoo.

Although India had only gained independence in 1947 and Prime Minister Nehru was extremely busy, he warmly responded to the children’s request. An elephant from the Kabini forest near the historic city of Mysore in Karnataka was chosen and named “Indira,” after Nehru’s daughter. On June 30, 1949, following a grand send-off ceremony in Bangalore, she began her journey to Japan.

In September 1949, after a long journey by train and ship, Indira arrived in Tokyo. More than 10,000 children gathered at the zoo to welcome her. The Indian mahouts who accompanied Indira had always spoken to her in Kannada, the local language of Karnataka; they taught the Japanese zookeepers how to give commands to Indira in Kannada as well.

Uncle Nehru, Please Send An Elephant! (Tulika Books)



The Strong Bond Between Zookeeper and Indira

In 1967, after living in Japan for many years, Indira fought with Jumbo, her enclosure mate of nearly two decades. Falling into the surrounding moat, she escaped the enclosure and roamed the zoo, sparking widespread panic as staff struggled to guide her back.

Since her arrival, a zookeeper named Mr. Ochiai had cared for Indira, forming a family-like bond of deep trust. However, Mr. Ochiai was at home, terminally ill with stomach cancer. Aware of his condition, the zoo staff went to Mr. Ochiai’s home, simply seeking his advice on how to calm Indira down. Upon hearing what had happened, Mr. Ochiai declared, “I’ll go!” and, despite his weakened state, stood up and headed to the zoo for the first time in six months. At first, Indira did not recognize his gaunt figure and turned her back on him. But the moment he called out, “Indira, it’s me!” she stopped short and stared at him. Instantly easing her tension, Indira quietly approached Mr. Ochiai, gently nuzzling his cheek with affectionate calls. When he whispered, “Let’s go back, Indira,” she quietly followed him into the elephant house. After bowing to those around him and saying, “I am deeply sorry my daughter caused so much trouble,” Mr. Ochiai got into a car to return home. As he departed, Indira let out a long, resonant cry: “Oon, oon, oooooon.”

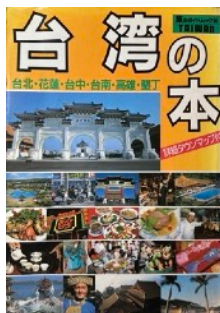
Just eight days later, Mr. Ochiai passed away. According to his wife, who was by his side, his very last word was “Indira...”

The Passing of Indira and Indira Gandhi

On August 11, 1983, Indira passed away peacefully after bringing joy to millions in Japan for over 30 years. The following month, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gifted two young elephants, Asha (Hope) and Daya (Compassion), to Ueno Zoo. Just a year later, on October 31, 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s life came to a tragic end.

Taiwan, 1988: Discovering the weight of History and the taste of Xiao Long Bao on my First Assignment.

About six months after starting my job, I went to go on my first business trip abroad. My destination was Taiwan. Through this assignment, I came to deeply realize the vital importance of learning the history of the places I cover.



Japan's Victory: Cession and Colonial Rule

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan modernized rapidly and, after its victory in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, was ceded Taiwan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. For the next fifty years, until Japan's defeat in 1945, Taiwan was legally part of Japan. This meant that anyone born in Taiwan during this half-century was given a Japanese name, spoke Japanese, and lived as a Japanese citizen.

After World War II, Japan withdrew, and Taiwan was officially incorporated into the Republic of China (ROC). However, new frictions soon surfaced between the local Taiwanese, who had experienced decades of modernization under Japanese rule, and the ROC military and civilians who had newly arrived from the mainland.

Two Chinas: The Historical Background

Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the ROC government was eventually forced to relocate to Taiwan in 1949 as the People's Republic of China (PRC) gained dominance. Chiang Kai-shek moved the government and the priceless treasures of the National Palace Museum to Taipei, establishing it as the provisional capital. Thus began the history of "Two Chinas," and Taiwan was placed under martial law for 38 years until 1987.

In 1972, diplomatic relations between Japan and the PRC were normalized, and China gifted giant pandas, Lan Lan and Kang Kang, to Ueno Zoo. At the time, a massive panda boom swept through Japan, and panda-themed merchandise became incredibly popular. On the other hand, official diplomatic relations between Japan and Taiwan were severed. Having lost their official air routes, the two nations nevertheless managed to keep their skies connected by establishing a separate subsidiary under Japan Airlines called "Japan Asia Airways."

Traveling Taiwan: Traces of the Colonial Era

It was in November 1988 — the year after martial law was lifted — that I first set foot in Taiwan. Back in Japan, Japan Asia Airways was running glamorous travel advertisements with the slogan, "Taiwan: Gentle to Women." This trend inspired our project for a magazine titled *The Book of Taiwan*. Together with another female editor and two photographers, we flew to Taipei, where we split into two teams to begin our coverage.

We were on a grueling schedule, traveling across Taiwan over the course of three weeks, visiting dozens of locations every single day. Serving as our interpreter was an elderly local gentleman who had been born and raised under Japanese rule.

At that time, traces of the colonial era still lingered heavily throughout Taipei. Inside the old Ximen Market office, under a single hanging lightbulb, I saw a faded photograph of the original Japanese founder, which left me with an indescribable feeling. While many places left a deep impression, I was truly overwhelmed by the scale of the *National Palace Museum* and its vast collection of artifacts brought from the mainland. It remains a place I hope to revisit someday.

Unforgettable Flavors: Regional Chinese Cuisine

With only a few hours of sleep each night, I was exhausted. Yet, the incredible flavors of regional Chinese cuisine — tasted for the first time — instantly blew my fatigue away. With top chefs from all over the mainland gathered in Taipei, the city offered authentic regional cuisines alongside local Taiwanese fare. Additionally, the rich aroma of Dongding Oolong tea at a teahouse completely redefined my concept of Oolong tea.

Among memories, *Din Tai Fung* — now a world-renowned chain — stands out vividly. This was before "xiao long bao" reached Japan. Steamer baskets arrived one after another, filled with xiao long bao featuring pork, crab roe, vegetables, and sweet red bean paste. Opening the lids unleashed steam and an irresistible aroma. Never before had the photographer's photo shoot felt so long.

Taiwan was my very first overseas assignment. Witnessing the lingering traces of Japanese rule and stepping through the gateway to an unknown world, this journey truly taught me how to look at the world.

The August 1985 U.S. Homestay that changed my Life

At a small women's university in Shimonoseki, I was studying Japanese literature to become a high school teacher, but at the same time, I felt a growing longing for foreign lands. In August 1985, feeling like a caged bird under a 7:00 pm. dorm curfew, I flew to California for a one-month homestay program. It was my first trip abroad.

Although Japan is often described as a small nation, the Genkai Sea and Mount Aso had always seemed vast and boundless to me. That perspective vanished the moment I landed at Los Angeles International Airport. I was met by diverse people, a tall black porter with enormous shoes, women who made my tall frame look petite, endless blue skies, and distant mountain ranges.

Everything I saw and heard during that single month shattered every standard and value I held within me. It is only by encountering something grand that one truly realizes their own smallness — an authentic, full-scale shock that no television or printed word could ever convey. For the first time, I learned the ambiguity of the word “standard.” I realized that even a simple measure like “big” or “small” is by no means universal.



Dozens of Japanese students stayed with host families in the Los Angeles suburbs and attended a language school on weekdays. I was welcomed by the Monroe family — a household of five with three children — with whom I had exchanged letters before arriving. Five-year-old Krista, the youngest daughter, treated me like a little sister. Since my English was poor, she lovingly looked after me, taking me along to greet the neighbors.

Living abroad for the first time brought fresh surprises, especially regarding meals. As devout Mormons, the Monroes used almost no seasoning in their cooking. With only salt and pepper on the table, we seasoned plain corn, steamed potatoes, and unseasoned beef patties ourselves. It was a unique experience. When eating out, on the other hand, I was always amazed by the huge portions.

By the time I returned to Japan, I could no longer picture myself working as a Japanese teacher in Fukuoka. Under the California sky, I swore to travel abroad again before my passport expired. After graduating, I moved to Tokyo to start my career as an editor for an overseas travel magazine. My life today is directly connected to that first trip to the United States.



Even to this day, my memories remain unfaded in that file.

Editor's Note 編集後記

A new chapter with *Sarasvati*

Publishing *Sarasvati* last month brought about a profound shift within me. For the first time in over twenty years, I can call myself an “editor” once again. Writing for print carries a distinct sense of tension compared to writing online. After countless rounds of proofreading, printing the final layout at home and binding *Sarasvati* by hand fills me with special affection for each copy. Starting this month, I plan to print several hundred copies at a commercial press.

I am currently considering ways to deliver bound copies of *Sarasvati* to those who wish to receive one. For the time being, both Japanese and English versions will be uploaded to Muse Creation's website, so please feel free to download them. I would be delighted if you shared them with those around you.

August 15, 2026

On a milestone day for India and Japan
Miho Sakata Malhan
(muse.india@me.com)



You can download the Japanese and English editions of *Sarasvati*, as well as back issues, right here.