

The pleasure of living and the happiness I have learned from South India

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Nobuo Sakai

Vital India

India is not only known as the cradle of Buddhism and yoga but also as a land surrounded in exotic mystery.

Many Japanese long to visit there at least once.

However, as a first impression for Japanese people, it can be quite shocking. Visually, there is a lot of rubbish through out the streets, and around us something smells bad.

You will see a lot of women holding their babies and beggars who use their handicaps to get money.

Despite this, many Japanese are interested in India, people feel the dynamism, the vitality of India through the sordid conditions. You can experience the persistent survival of human beings and animals.

In a sense, I think India may be the place which shows people and animals living most naturally.

I visited South India where few Japanese tourists have been. It is quite different from the tourist attractions. The more well known places such as The Taj Mahal, Benares, and Buddha-gaya.

It's a tropical or sub tropical climate all year around. They can get various crops and fruits from a great benefactor of nature. The people there are mild. The security in this area is maintained better than North India. Japanese tourists travelling through India say, "When we come to South India, we can feel relaxed."

Nowadays in India IT is on the increase, the number of cars is increasing and economic growth is remarkable. However, we can still see naked old men and children lying on the street next to the acclaimed modern buildings. It is a shocking contrast. What we saw and heard in India made us feel "new" because we are used to "modern life."

I thought India is great ...strange... Why is India like this? At first, as I viewed India through the eyes of one who is living in Japan, I noticed the "uncommonness of India."

But as time passed, my thoughts have matured. It is an experience that has changed my life.

I started to question the Japan I knew, and Japanese society. I came to believe that this is the way people should live naturally, as humans, observing the natural rhythm of India.

"We must change Japan."

What I felt the most is that people in India (both children and adults) have toughness, sturdiness, and are cheerfully energetic.

I saw workers doing civil engineering with insufficient tools, people eating poor meals with relish flopping on the dirty streets, children playing with stones and sticks on the streets cheerfully. I was touched and to see that their life is hard and yet they remain positive and charmingly philosophical about their circumstances and apparent hard luck.

Let's look back our life in Japan.

Under developed capitalism, we live comfortably and conveniently like never before.

Though Japan is said to have as in other societies, a *Kakusa Syakai* (the economic and social gap between the rich and the poor), most people are comfortably well off with regular meals, clothing and shelter as part of every day life.

But does that mean we feel happy about our lives?

The other day, I got a e-mail from my acquaintance who lives in the metropolitan area.

She said, "Tokyo is terrible. Though I do not go downtown often, when I change trains at *Shibuya* or *Shinjyuku* station, it looks like as if many zombies are walking."

I think that a lot of Japanese people probably have the same reaction. Although we have become economically more prosperous, the old days were better, we are not made happy by things. I can hear these words everywhere. Nostalgic movies and music from the *Showa* period are more popular these days with the viewing public.

How can we get back that "happiness" which we naturally enjoyed once. Nobody can answer the question, can only follow the status quo, sometimes voicing their concerns, complaints and anxieties among each other. We are like frogs trapped in a jar with no apparent way out.

We know the issues but we can not solve them. I think that is the problem of the social system.

Material things are only means to an end.

We have come to believe from our parents, the media and our society that money is the be-all and end-all. I am afraid we take them for granted. Previously thought of as luxury goods, the computer, DVD *etc.* have now become accepted as a necessary part of our existence. We may think we will become happy in believing capitalism is the best. However, it does not seem to be what we need. It does not give us complete satisfaction.

In our addiction to play things, the pursuing of money, the need for expensive goods, we have lost our basic humanity. We are now the congregation of a selfish, evil, money-based religion, and we need to find the truth again.

What should we do to get back real happiness and the pleasure in life? I think one of the solutions is "a living posture."

I have two meanings for this.

One is how we control our mind, for example tough, sturdy and cheerful.

The other is a good physical posture which we can actually see.

The great philosopher, educator, the late Mr. Shinzo Mori kept talking about this. "The fundamental principle of education is straightening up the back in our lives." He said that living in an upright position every day is the basis of good life.

I felt it was wonderful to see the Indian people's posture. They stand very upright. I never saw them slouch during their work, play and in their daily life. In India it is their practice to put a big pack on their heads when they carry them. I think that they have a similar custom in Southeast Asia and Africa.



[Sankarankovil](#)

[Tamilnad State in India](#)

[Nihonzann Myouhouji](#)

[Peace pagoda construction field](#)

That is why people in India always straighten up in general.

What if the Japanese try to put something on their head as well?

Probably we can keep it up for a moment, but it's a difficult task to walk with the pack on our heads without dropping it, even if it is the young people with their strong bodies. Some Japanese young people sit in front of the convenience store or on the train or bus without feeling embarrassed or ashamed. They look like puppets whose strings have been cut. Not only zombies but also ghosts, their bodies and eyes lacking spirit. I feel these days the Japanese have very little vital energy or power of life, they have become weaker and stoop instead of standing proud.

Mr. Shinzo Mori taught us the importance of good posture. To stand upright with a raised hip bone. But to my great regret he hardly mentioned how to actually achieve this.

Though I have wondered why it was for a long time, I have finally realized this: Not so long ago, may be in the early years of the *Showa* era the time to which Mr. Mori refers, the Japanese were strong enough and healthy enough to maintain a good posture, it took only a command, to straighten up their posture.

Eating food is the basis of life

The Japanese frame has changed these several decades since the war.

They have become taller, their legs longer, and the shape of their chins has become slender because they do not need to eat hard foods anymore.

Their faces and bodies have also become slender. More than diet is involved in this change.

If you look at old Japanese pictures, you will see people wearing belts supporting their underbelly thus straightening up the stomach and back. The Japanese call the central point of strength in the body *Seikatanden*, it is believed to control the flood of energy in life. This energy is based around the waist. A well supported, middle area is believed to be important in the efficient control of the body's energy fields.

Long ago, all the Japanese as well as people in India had real excellent physical abilities.

Why have our bodies and postures changed?

I think the biggest reason is a change of Nutrition.

Before I went to India, I was afraid of the food I would find there. I hoped to avoid eating and may be able to go on a diet. In fact, I was very surprised by its taste. The reality amazed me the most.

Broadly speaking, they have a lot of curry based food with plenty of spices thrown in, not a lot of varieties in the daily basic Indian diet.

However, each dish is not only tasty but also leaves you invigorated with a sense of vitality. I am sure I had a lot of energy when I was eating. I felt refreshed and lively.

When I met a lot of Japanese tourists in South India, some older Japanese people missed Japanese food. Most of the people especially young people praised the taste of South Indian food.

I never missed Japanese food when I stayed in India and Sri Lanka for a month.

On the contrary, when I got back, I was disappointed at Japanese food which for me, is without vital spark.

In India, the lack of sleep changed my rhythm of life. The mosquitoes annoyed me all night, I sometimes woke up out of sorts after having too much fan ended wind. But I became stronger without knowing it. I felt more natural and healthier as the curing ability of my body strengthened. I am sure that it is because of the power which South Indian food has.

I do not mean that food culture in South India is better than that of Japan. In fact, Japan has an rich food culture, and it is common knowledge that Japanese food is said to be one of the most healthy food in the world. Now as the food is served on the table, it looks luxurious in comparison to decades before, but if we think of it as "food for living." It is far from ideal. And there lies the problem.

It is my fear that the modern Japanese eating habit is "destroying the Japanese" these days.

If we continue this way, we will never enjoy true satisfaction and feel the real significance of happiness even if we continue with our economic prosperity. Some of you may think that I am exaggerating.....But I am sure I felt more physically powerful

within my body when I breathed and ate in India.

I have some ideas of what we should do and need to do to get back our "food for living."

1. Increase the self-sufficiency rate

We have to escape the present dangers of the world. We need to understand that fundamentally, food has an important purpose. *"Shindofuji"*

The food we make, makes us. (We work best with the food which has been produced in our local region and at the appropriate season) .

2. Revival of Japanese traditional food

Recently our eating habits are badly balanced. We eat too much rich food. We have a lot of problems with the flood of junk food and fast food in Japan. We definitely eat too much animal food protein. We need to eat much more grain especially rice in our staple diet. We should eat more *miso* soybean paste, soy sauce, pickles, good quality fermented vegetables.

3. We should eat food which gives us the power for life

This time I do not mean food stuff not nutrition. Food which has a lot of an agricultural chemicals, fertilizer and food additives gives us very little "of the Natural energy of life." Recently the news reported that, "Soil in Japan has little enzymatic fermentation and so the vegetables harvested there have little enzymatic fermentation.

We have to rethink what food gives us life power and nutrition so as to lead a better life.

In addition, we should improve our agriculture and soil to harvest good foods.

It has been 5 years since I started a countryside based life in the *Nasu* highland in *Tochigi* prefecture.

I have become more aware of my eating habits. Surprising, I am usually satisfied with a small meal when I am at home. But when I eat out, I am unsatisfied even if my stomach is full.

I think the vegetables which are harvested from my home field are fresh and have a lot of life's energy.

That is why I am soon satisfied with only a little. Confirming the words, "eating food gives you a necessary energy for life."

Miho Takagi (Personality, essayist)

In 2004 December, there was a big earthquake in the Sumatra offering. The village where I visited also was much damaged by tsunami.

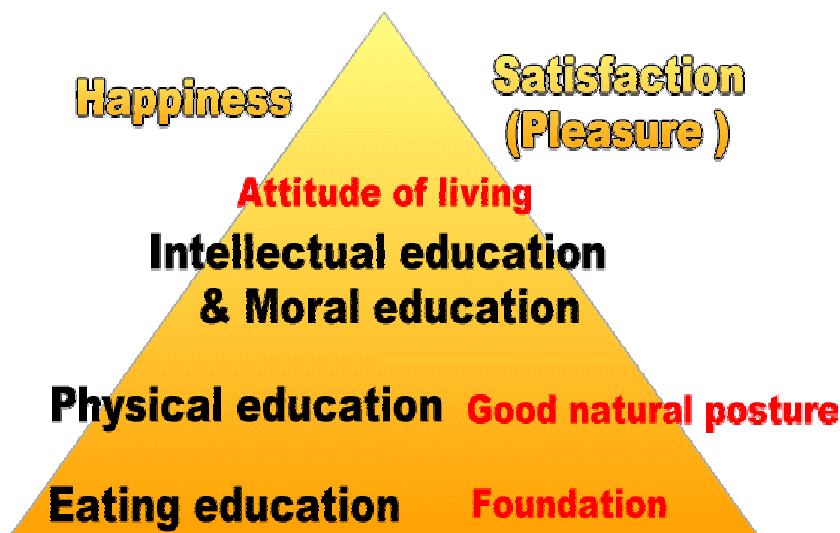
Over 200,000 people in the world lost their lives, including 40 Japanese people. We can recognize the Japanese remains easily.

Why? Because Japanese remains never rot due to their dietary habits.

We need to review our present eating habits in Japan as soon as possible.

Thinking about the matter in terms of "Education" we need intellectual education and moral education to form brilliant minds. It is my belief that we need a good physical education, and a good natural posture to live better.

This is not training for running fast or jumping high, but basically internal training to live a life. In other words, we need to feed our soul as well as our bodies. To grow strong bodies, we need to take good food. To form creative, positive minds we need food that build those needs too!! The foundation of a well rounded individual is an sound eating education.



We have the right to achieve happiness.

We do not have to find something new.

The only thing we need is to discover is what is actually important for ourselves and to

pursue it.

"Happiness is not about getting it but also about noticing it."

Put the thoughts "To have convenience and abundance leads to happiness." aside and please remember the old days of Japan. It was not a convenient society and certainly there was not nearly as much food as there is today. Humans lived according to the bounty of nature.

We lived at one, in harmony with the seasons and foods that our fields provided us with. And of course, I observed that the less well off people in South India live with what food is found and cultivated in nature.

Attitude of living touched people

I visited several homes for orphans, and met a lot of orphans who have bright smiles in South India.

It may be true, I have heard that the poorer the country is, the more wonderful the children's face are.

Children who live simply with a regular routine can express their joy for living openly.

They have no bikes which are common among Japanese children, neither own a P.C. or doll.

They only play with tops, balls and stones or swings in the park. That is all. But they do not seem to mind.

When I was a child, I went out until dark, explored the mountains and played hide-and-seek. Our playing tools were marbles, the Japanese card game, *menko*, and toy guns. I treasured them.

The people in India enjoy their own life and the orphans also seem to enjoy themselves every day.

On the second night, I visited a home in South India which has a Christian education guidance. After the home's night service, I attended a welcome ceremony in the big chapel.

I was given a lei which was made of beautiful jasmine. I saw 9 couples of children

dancing on the stage with music.



Tamilnad State,
the southernmost in India
Kanyakumari

Home for orphans
St. Boniface Anbaham

They danced for us delightfully.

My heart was full of joy to see each boy and girl from small to big dancing energetically. I understand that a lot of people shed tears when they were welcomed. I felt satisfied within the atmosphere found in that party and I found out who I was from visiting India.

Their dancing is heartfelt, however, they do not have many special skills, or practiced performance or special costume. They are not trained in any way. But there is something wonderful about them. They are totally instinctive.

Something touched my heart deeply.

One thing that I observed is not only their dancing but their control over their behavior. This time I mean by "good posture, their attitude for living, the concern for, and gentle dispositions towards other friends dancing on the stage.



In the morning and evening,
they pray in the chapel.

They sit in order according to
school age or gender.

They sit cross-legged on the hard floor directly, so they always practice good physical posture.

That mean not the strict posture as found in army personal, but their apparent ability to naturally sit in an upright position for long periods of time. It means they have good physical abilities.

I was touched at both of these points. These attitudes moved me.

Recently in a "*Chichi*" 2008, No. 5 magazine, Japanese Shogi League president Ikuo Yonenaga said, when he answered the questions about how to coach to young shogi player,

"First, I see the atmosphere of the person. How he sits, his eyes for shogi. If he sit on his heels, sit up straight and stares at the shogi board. He is sure to become a strong winner. If he does so, his age and ability is not so important. The game is something special to watch."

That's it! I agree with that. I felt the same thing from the children in India.

The same magazine quoted, Mr. Mitsugu Otsuka, the Nagano prefecture Ueda city former board of education superintendent of schools. He works on and reported on the Nutrition education in the wilderness education. He put rice in the school menu, after which they observed that the children gradually changed.

"From 1993 we changed to rice at school meals 5 days in a 6 day week. When I talking about rice, I do not mean white rice but germination brown rice that includes GABA (it makes our blood clean and softens our blood vessels). He added 10 % of it to the usual rice. As a result,

After about 7 months Our school became calm.

After 7 months We never saw a cigarette butt.

After from 1.5 years to 2 years No delinquency and crimes. The student's eagerness to study improved. The students could not have a seat because the library was full up (120 seats). They read books sitting on the floor. At last the hallway was also flooded with students.

A nutritional meal conclusively influences children's spirits and attitude of life.

This is naturally the same for adults.

We should understand and appreciate this.



There are a lot of nature around their home.

Here are a lot of coconuts.

The boys like to spin tops very much.



I know that I have enough food

I had a lovely welcoming dance from the children. After the ceremony, they were very pleased when I took their pictures.

They are enthralled by the little tiny daily things that we take for granted.



They are all good friends.

They dressed up
because it was
a welcome party today.

This picture is blurred because it was dark.

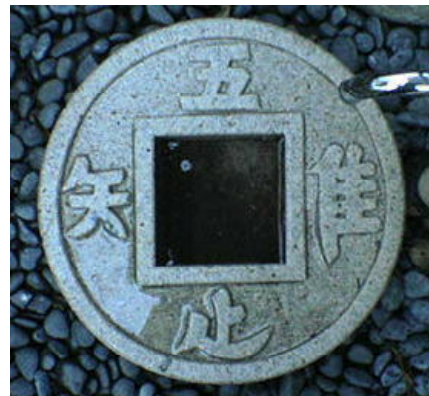
Can you see this nice smile? How can do justice to portraying their smiles? I can not Too Cute, too beautiful

Why they can smile so nicely?

Not because they are greeting their parents, or have just been given their allowance and such like. As soon as the ceremony finished, they started romping in front of my camera. That's all.

They express their joy with all their bodies and souls. There is nothing like this wonderful thing, is there? They are happy.

Children who live in these homes have few private things. They only have their school supplies, school uniforms, and private clothes which is kept in a suit case.



In spite of their humble life, why can they smile nicely?

I have been thinking about this.

Now I understand. It is not "in spite of "but "because." They can express this appreciation of life.

We all were endowed with "brightness of life" equally by nature.

As we grow, we gain a lot of knowledge and have enough sense to understand but we lose the brightness.

However, when I was with them, I became glaringly aware that our basic natures are filled with brightness and joy. That is the truth.

"I know I have enough bread." I have heard these words from a lot of Buddhist priests and my teachers. Though I already thought that I knew, I realize that I have come to understand better now.

We should find the natural way of life, it does not mean something necessarily found in the present. In today's modern society, something around us, whether it be, status, title, knowledge, and so on, hinders our simple joy.

We already have the most important things in our lives. Whether we are children or adults, rich or poor, all that we need is found in our heart, I learned that from them.



After they bathed
and washed
in the morning.

Their smiles are full of joy.

Living is what counts

The Children from the home welcomed me from the bottom of their heart despite me being just a strange face from a foreign land.

They treated me like a special guest. They took me to their cottages, chatted with me, showed their text books, played with me. They looked truly happy when I was with them.

Because I could not communicate with them through words, I only nodded at their talk. I held hands with little boys and girls, occasionally cradling them in my arms, helping them climb up the trees.....That's all what I could do for them.

Though restricted in my words, they accepted me with a broad smile. "By only being with them, I could share a mutual happiness with them." I can give them pleasure. It was a great experience for me. I was a "help" rather than gratification.

We start learning from when we are small. We are educated so that we may become better people so as to be helpful for our societies.
In a sense, it means we are supposed to be precious because we contribute towards our various societies.

Is it really true?
I was the only foreigner who could not communicate verbally with them.
I am useless, worthless, while in their home, however they welcomed me.
"Mr. Sakai, you are special only you are here. The ability to exist makes us special.
To live is precious".
They taught me a lot that through their passion for life and by watching their day to day joys.

These observations knocked my view of life, it shook my core values.
Now I can understand it intellectually but I do not know how to reflect these changes in my world and way of life.

I would like to inform a lot of people what I have learned from them.
I think it is my life's mission to pass on this joy. That is the only thing I can do for those children and for us.

If you have been touched by my report, it would be my pleasure to make your acquaintance through this.

Translator Hiroko Furumoto
Christine Carson