

Oshōgatsu Unwrapped: The Traditions Behind Japan's New Year



My admiration about Japan and its culture from childhood motivated me to be a part of IJSC this year. There I met my friend Hyoga, from Osaka. We talked a lot about our respective cultures and festivals and I was intrigued to know about how people in Japan welcome the new year. He started describing the festivities, which begin as early as Christmas, as it does in India. The streets, the trees, are bedecked with lights, making the whole city light up in the cold winter evenings and that people eat KFC (fried chicken) during Christmas.

In Japan, people celebrate Oshōgatsu, the Japanese name for New Year's Day. On New Year's Day, he meets his parents and grandparents at his family home in Fukushima, where he spent all his childhood. With enthusiasm to share his experiences, Hyoga told me about the Kadomatsu, a traditional decoration for New Year's Holiday. It is a beautiful arrangement of Bamboo, Pine, straws etc. which are placed in pairs in front of the main gate of the house, to welcome the ancestral spirits, and prosperity. He also mentioned that at midnight of 31st December, all the Buddhist temples have a ritual to ring their bells a total of 108 times, which symbolize 108 earthly temptations. The new year feast includes a set of assorted sweet, sour and savory food items, traditionally termed as Osechi ryōri. He did mention that this differs in different regions of Japan. Hyoga introduced me to Kagami Mochi, which is basically a form of traditional mochi with a tangerine on top.

Hyoga told me that he will send me Nengajō, or greeting cards, this New Year's Day. It was such a heartwarming gesture on his behalf as it reminded me of the childhood days when we used to buy New Year Greetings cards for our friends. I wish to spend a New Year's Eve in Japan someday...

かちゅう くり ひろ

火中の栗を拾う | To endanger oneself for someone

~Aditya Prasad

MEET Sakurako Abe



SAKURAKO ABE came to Kolkata recently to attend the 4th Kolkata World Film Festival with her recent documentary film "PARVATHY BAUL – Cross the Golden River". And CONGRATULATIONS! She got an award as Special Jury Mention for the BEST DOCUMENTARY! We had a conversation with her. She speaks Bengali, Hindi and English so well!

Q : Don't you want to direct any feature film in future?

A : I have been making documentary films for 24 years. Yes, I definitely want to direct feature films in future. But before that I want to do more documentary films on BAUL and Japanese Sado (tea ceremony).

Q : You stayed at Shantiniketan...

A : Coming to India in 1992 I, started to live in Bihar while learning Mithila Painting (Madhubani Painting) from Mithila University (Darbhanga). But being uncomfortable to live in Bihar

I shifted to Shantiniketan as one of my Japanese friends, learning Indian classic dance there.

Q : But why Mithila Painting?

A : I saw an exhibition on Mithila painting in Tokyo. There I met Godawari Dutta, famous Mithila Painter, Indian Padmashree Awardee. Her works were displayed in Mithila Museum in Takomachi, and Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. One of her famous paintings "TRISHUL" (Trident) is kept in a museum in Japan. I was so impressed that immediately I decided to go to Bihar to learn Mithila painting.

Q : Your first meeting with PARVATHY BAUL (alias Moushumi Parial)?

A : Studying Hindi (as there was no course on Mithila painting) in Shantiniketan I started to live in a rented house. During that time Parvathy (that time, her name was Mousumi Parial) was searching for a rented house. Then somebody suggested her to go to live with me in my rented house. In this way I met her. Gradually I became passionately interested in BAUL song and culture, the concept of SADHANA (worship, pursuit), GURU – SHISHYO PPROMPARA (tradition of spiritual teacher and disciple), and so many nuances of BAUL sect.

Q : From childhood you were attracted to Indian music and culture.

A : My father, a lawyer and my mother, a housewife didn't like my passion. My father wanted me to pursue a course on science. But I left the agricultural course of Tamagawa University in Tokyo and went to India. Reading a Manga on Buddha by OSAMU TEZUKA, famous Manga artist, I was attracted to Indian culture. From the very early age I also started to ask myself about our existence in the world! I went on to make many documentaries on Japan's mountain, pilgrimage and Buddha statue, Sundarban honey hunting and Rathayatra of Odisha. In 2019 I directed 'THE PATH', documentary on BAUL. Then I made this documentary on PARVATHY BAUL.

Q : Have you seen any resemblance with any Japanese traditional group to Indian BAUL culture?

A : Yes. JISHUU culture is so much similar with Indian BAUL culture. JISHUU (時宗) is a very unique school of Buddhism in Japan. Its founder was IPPEN – SHONIN. It focuses on the recitation of Nembutsu (a prayer to Amida Buddha). Its headquarters is in SHOJOKOJI (name of YUGYOJI is more popular than Shojokouji) Temple in Fujisawa, Kanagawa. It is also known as the "school of time". Its followers believe in attaining rebirth in the pure land through the power of Amida Buddha and the most uniqueness of Jishu was the chanting of the Nembutsu while dancing. BAUL represents a unique and vibrant spiritual tradition that emphasizes personal experience, love, and freedom from religious dogma, all expressed through their captivating and mesmerizing music and poetry. BAUL mystic minstrels, wandering yogis (or spiritual practitioners) travelling from place to place sharing their songs and philosophy living a very simple life.

Q : Besides film making do you have any other hobby?

A : Going on hiking, mountaineering and watching baseball!



People having connections to Japan in some way come together at NKKS to pursue their interest. However, the true friendships and meaningful social relations that develop in due course of time through several gatherings becomes a valuable lifetime memento. Let us all put our hearts to enrich such interactions and cherish more aspects about ourselves!

NKKS Bijoya Sammelani

15 November 2025 (Sat)



Full article
in next
edition

NKKS Picnic

28 December 2025 (Sun)



Riddle

~ Khushboo Agarwal

わか とき せ たか とし と せ
若い時は背が高いけど、年を取ると背
ひく なに
が低くなるものって何？



Riddle Solution (Nov – Dec 2025)

やくそく
約束



10 January 2026 (Sat)
2.00 PM

6th Singing Japanese
Language Contest

@Ramakrishnananda Hall, RMIC

22 February 2026 (Sun)
5.00 PM

Challenges in Translation

~by Ms. Priyaly Chakraborty

Further details will be sent by email

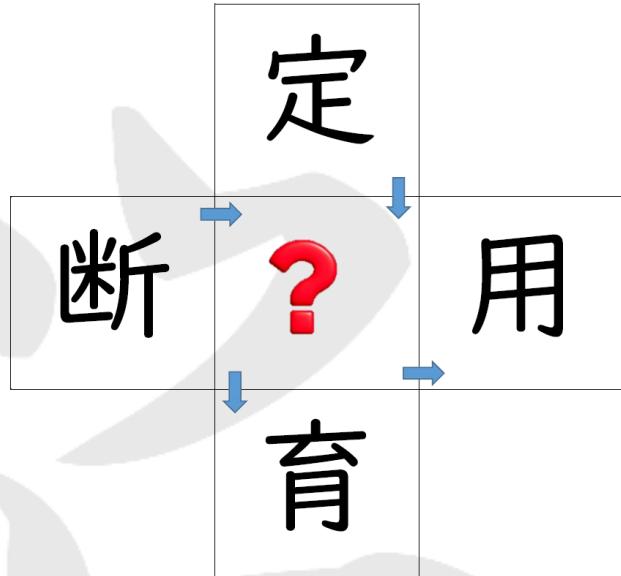
Sincere thanks to Tisyagupta-san for contributing 'Find the Person' puzzle for more than 2 years. Please look forward to the 'Anaume' column by Adesh-san!

~ Editorial Team

あな う 穴埋め

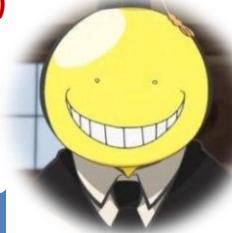
~ Adesh Kumar Sahoo

Fill in the centre square with a single kanji character such that when combined with each of the 4 given kanji characters, it will make 4 distinct meaningful words.



Find the Person Solution (Nov – Dec 2025)

ころ せん せい
殺先生



Scan the QR codes to watch
the videos !

New Year



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Punctual trains



[Click here](#)

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