

Ankit Kumar Srivastava



Founding members: Ankit Kumar Srivastava (Author), Professor Randeep Rakwal, Ritesh Patel, Ranjith Kumar Bakku

**Namaste Tsukuba: The beginning**

Namaste is the Indian way of greeting each other. It is a courtesy greeting when people meet or leave. Namaste is spoken with a slight bow with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointing upwards, thumbs close to the chest. Literally Namaste can be translated as 'I bow to you'. The bowing down of the head is a gracious form of extending friendship, love, respect and humility.

And it was for this reason only that Namaste Tsukuba was conceptualised in 2015. It was for extending the hand of love and friendship to the new incoming student and to bring together all Indian students of the University. It was also meant to establish a friendly environment on international grounds, providing a common platform for inter-cultural exchange.

Through this platform, the group has been able to tie and inter-connect most of the Indian students studying in the University of Tsukuba. Last semester we welcomed and assisted new students and introduced our University and Tsukuba city to them. We are in the process of doing the same for students who are about to join the university in the coming semester. Through this inter-connection we were also able to find many new friends of different nationality, including Japanese, and build a healthy friendship at the global level.

**Major Events and Visits**

We participated in events such as the Tsukuba International Festival (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May), where we had expected a moderate number of visitors to our booth. But to our surprise the booth was filled with visitors throughout the two days. In particular, Tsukuba kids liked colouring Indian animation characters. The Mehndi session was the highlight of our booth and kids, girls mostly, women, mothers and other foreigners enjoyed it. We also had a photo exhibition introducing India (depicting its architecture, natural and wild life, important geographical locations and tourist attractions) and a spice exhibition with real spices from India on display. Many curious people of Tsukuba came to enquire about it and many profoundly shared their experience of personal India visit. One cute little Japanese girl, filled with imagination came to us and asked 'why there are so many elephants in India?' to which we could only reply — because we have many forests.

Our group also visited the UNESCO world heritage site of Nikko Toshogu for the Grand memorial service on 17<sup>th</sup> May, marking 400 years since the death of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of Tokugawa Shogunate in the Edo period. We went around the grand grave of Ieyasu, saw the three wise monkeys that aroused memories of the ambassador of peace Mahatma Gandhi and witnessed prayers, rituals and Yabusame (Archery on Horseback).

On 15<sup>th</sup> August, with patriotic feelings we went to the Indian Embassy for the Independence Day celebration; this day also happens to be the 'Memorial Day for the end of the War'. Hence, we also visited Yasukuni Shrine and witnessed another aspect of Japan. A Japan that regrets the war and makes sure that it never takes place again.



Group Photograph

While we were seeing the memorial monument of Radha Binod Pal, one Japanese came to us and asked, 'are you from India?', and hearing a yes from us he expressed a sense of gratitude and said 'Thank you very much. This man helped my country when nobody helped us.' After this overwhelming experience, we experienced a Japan that has come far away from those war tragedies. We witnessed the present day Cool Japan, i.e. animation, Manga, and Cos-play at the Comike (Comic Market). The Cos-players were out in full force and while beating the unbearable heat they posed for the Otaku.

**Other Events and gatherings**

Apart from these events, we also participated in a number of events and visited many places. We participated in the Breast Cancer awareness program of the Pink Ribbon Festival on 29<sup>th</sup> April as volunteers for New Mira, an Indian Restaurant near the university. We enjoyed the Tsukuba Beer Festival on 25<sup>th</sup> July with beer, lovely Japanese songs sung by artist, and doing Bon odori. Next we went to the Tsuchiura Kirara festival on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, where we saw people dancing and singing to the rhythmic sounds of Taiko drums in a complete festive mood.

On 9<sup>th</sup> Aug., we went to Oarai sun beach where we enjoyed a lot with the high rise waves of the ocean. We also visited the ancient Isosaki shrine and saw the majestic view of Kamiso no tori, i.e. Kamiso Gate that stands on an island rock in the sea. Splash from the oceanic waves hitting the rock washes the gate repeatedly. The mystical atmosphere and the divine sound from those splashes were very refreshing and calming.

We also participated in the Bon Odori festival on 16<sup>th</sup> August, held near Tsukuba Centre. We enjoyed dancing with Tsukuba people and in fact I won a prize in the lottery which made the day even more special. We also enjoyed the fair and the festivity of the Tsukuba Summer festival on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August. The parade with Nebuta, dragons, lanterns, bod odori, food stalls, and other booths took our heart away. We among ourselves competed to get hold of the lucky bells that the parade people throw towards the crowd.

Apart from this we have been conducting many social gathering and dinners, where many Japanese and foreign friends and professors participated. We organised welcome parties, farewell party and also a gathering collaborating with other groups such as City Chat Café and Tokyo food.

**Well Began is Half Done**

We started with a very small aim of bonding all the Indians together in a group, which we achieved with the help of T-ACT. We made many new Japanese and other foreign friends and organised and participated in many events and programs. This was made possible due to the continuous support and encouragement from our mentor, Professor Randeep Rakwal. However, there is a saying 'Well began is half done', we have just started the group and did few events but the real challenge is to maintain and carry forward the group with the same vigour and zeal. We have just started and we have many miles to cover.



Mehndi session at Tsukuba International Festival