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The term 'education' brings to mind exams and competition, and the entire duration of schooling in Sri Lanka has created intense rivalry among its student population. But would you believe that there are no exams for primary students in Japanese schools?

You may wonder what they study and how they're promoted to the next grade...

As a country with minimal social classes, Japan provides equal opportunities to all its citizens. People show respect and bow to each other, regardless of their education, occupation, social status, age, gender or financial position. And the concept of equality is mainstreamed in Japanese schools.

Japanese schools teach manners and greetings, cleanliness and physical training to shape well-rounded individuals. In terms of land size, the country is smaller than California but is the world's third largest economy. It is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable while being a rich nation – purely because of its education process and the behaviour of citizens.

In Japan, children from the nursery level to higher grades

such as junior high school (O-Level in Sri Lanka) eat food provided by their school or education department of that area.

Everyone has to consume a balanced meal and it is a custom to eat all the food on one's plate. The teacher waits until the last student has finished eating and thereafter, the children must clean their classroom, the passages and even their own washrooms.

The schools in Japan don't employ peons, janitors or minor staff to do cleaning or office work. Classroom teachers, the principal and other staff engage in cleaning activities. The 45 minute lunch break is considered educational where everyone practises manners and learns to work as part

of a team. Equality is carefully practised by all students.

In Japanese schools, students have to carry standard schoolbags and children from Grades 1 to 6 use the same bag throughout this period. It was once a standard that male students use black bags and females red ones. But these days, some colour variations can be seen in schoolbags.

Nevertheless, a majority still follow this standard throughout Japan. Through this process, students learn to use the same item for a longer period. Furthermore, this practice makes it difficult to distinguish social class based on parents' wealth and spending capacity.

All Japanese schoolchildren enjoy the seasons with their fellow students, teachers and

parents. These are events where everyone enjoys the sakura flower season in April, summer festivals in August, autumn picnics in October and snow festivals or skiing functions in January.

Agriculture is a tradition in Japan where everyone participates in rice planting. In most village areas, almost every school has its own paddy field.

Students and teachers

participate in rice planting, harvesting, and small-scale vegetable and fruit planting on small plots. This is a collective activity where parents, grandparents and everyone in the local community contribute either labour or resources based on their capacity.

The Japanese are members of a collective society and there are plenty of lessons Sri Lankans can learn from them. Their education process nurtures its human capital, and appreciates their culture and environment. The ethos in Japan can be a great teacher for Sri Lankan educators and policy makers.

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