

# Contributing to Environment and Sanitation Improvement by Reading Japanese Picture Books

Spreading the Spirit of “Mottainai” to Children in India

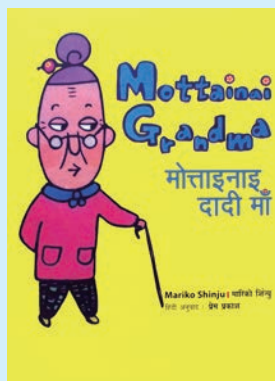
In India, where economic growth is remarkable, the sanitation environment is in a very poor state across the country, such as water pollution due to outdoor defecation, and air pollution due to inappropriate disposal of city garbage. As such, the Modi Administration launched the “Clean India” campaign in 2014 to promote public health, and has been advancing efforts such as infrastructure development, aiming to eradicate outdoor defecation and other problems by October 2019, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi.

Under such circumstances, Mr. Yoshiaki Koga, Senior Deputy Director of the International Business Development Department of Kodansha Ltd. (a major Japanese publishing company) came up with a bright idea that through reading aloud the best-seller picture book by Ms. Mariko Shinju “Mottainai Grandma” to the children in India, it would help to raise awareness among the people towards the environment and sanitation in India. This picture book explains the act of handling things with care by spreading the Japanese spirit of “Mottainai.” In 2016, this plan was selected for JICA’s “Preparatory Survey (BOP Business Promotion)” (currently: SDGs Business Supporting Survey (see page 106 for details)). With the support from Japan-affiliated companies like Itochu and Maruti Suzuki\*, a campervan was built to serve as a kind of mobile library, which was driven around public schools in Delhi and the neighboring state of Haryana to conduct storytelling activities of “Mottainai Grandma.”

“I was moved when the children remembered the Japanese word, ‘Mottainai’” says Mr. Sanjay Panda, Managing Director of IJ Kakehashi Services Pvt. Ltd., that supports businesses between Japan and India. Together with Mr. Koga, he has worked hard on negotiating with local people in the education sector, and engaging himself in the storytelling activities. A survey was conducted to find out what kind of effects the storytelling activity had on a total of 3,000 children, and it turned out that not only did some children no longer put more food than necessary on their own plates, but others were even trying to change their parents’ attitude towards littering, as Mr. Panda explains. Furthermore, when he saw that in the schools where the storytelling was conducted, students who were nominated as “Mottainai Ambassadors” pointed out the behaviors of those who did Mottainai things, or children were making playthings out of the dishes and cans they used, he truly felt that his efforts were producing results. Mr. Panda is confidently

says, “Children’s awareness can be changed through this picture book, which could be linked up with their everyday behavior.”

Mr. Koga and Mr. Panda are also conducting a number of new projects in quick succession, such as reading the book to children while performing the “Mottainai Dance,” created locally in a fully reserved railroad coach of the subway in New Delhi, which Japanese companies took part in the construction process. In another project, they asked the



Indian version of “Mottainai Grandma” (published by National Book Trust)



Children enjoying the picture book read to them in front of the campervan (Photo: Kodansha)

children to draw pictures with the concept of “Mottainai,” and awarded the best work. Furthermore, they have approached four state governments to propose the distribution of the picture books to children and the introduction of the books as a supplementary resource for textbooks.

In January 2018, among the various official languages in India, Hindi and English translations of “Mottainai Grandma” were published by the country’s largest governmental publisher, National Book Trust. Going forward, there are plans to translate the book into 11 state languages other than Hindi, and in the future, Ms. Shinju intends to make a new book on the theme of the connections and importance of life, with a “river” as the setting, inspired by her visit to the Ganges River.

Ms. Mariko Shinju’s earnest feelings flow through the foundations of these picture books. Ms. Wangari Maathai<sup>2</sup>, a proponent of the “Mottainai Campaign” encouraged Ms. Shinju by saying, “In ‘Mottainai,’ there are ‘4Rs’ because the concept of ‘Respect’ is added to the environmental ‘3Rs’<sup>3</sup> which will lead to world peace. Keep up the good work!” Ms. Shinju continues to convey the spirit of “Mottainai” to children by drawing picture books.

Ms. Shinju says “I decided to create the picture book, ‘Mottainai Grandma’ when my son asked, ‘What does Mottainai mean?’ At first, because it was difficult to explain ‘Mottainai’ using another word, I hoped that he would get an idea of the meaning by reading the picture book. Now, I explain that, ‘Mottainai involves many feelings like appreciation, consideration and kindness,’ or ‘Mottainai is the feeling of respect.’ I wish to convey to children the message that we should eat everything, without leaving anything on the plate by appreciating the life we eat, the blessings of nature, and the people who produce the food, as well as treat things with care.”

Mr. Koga hopes that through these activities, children in India will come to treat nature and things with cares, and furthermore, the way they think about the environment and sanitation in India will change. Going forward, he will continue to expand the areas of his activities across the whole of India, under Mr. Panda’s philosophy that, “If people have knowledge, their consciousness will change.”

\*1 Vehicle manufacturer, subsidiary of Suzuki Motor Corporation.

\*2 Former Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, Republic of Kenya. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (2004) as the first African woman, and for the first time in the field of environment.

\*3 A term referring to the initial letter of Reduce (reduce consumption, reduce waste), Reuse and Recycle.