

WORKING PAPER: X

TRAVELS BY LEADERS: INDIA AND VIETNAM

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1. Introduction

The commercial, religious and maritime linkages between India and Vietnam date to the ancient period and continue in the medieval period as attested by archaeological records and literary references to the travel of Indian and Vietnamese Buddhist monks. In the colonial period Vietnam formed a part of the French colony of Indo China, and it is in this time period that migration and settlement of Indians into Vietnam occurs. As for the term Indo China Pham Quynh wrote “one side is Chi-na, while the other is An-Do [India], and thus we have this land of Dong Duong, which is quite rightly given the name of An-Do-Chi-na”.(Pham Quynh, ‘Les annamites au Laos’, France-Indochine, no 3,403, 6 March 1931, p. 1; Pham Quynh, ‘vientiane la poussièreuse’, France-Indochine, no. 3,397, 27 February 1931, p. 1.)¹ He also notes in his travelogue: “The further we drove from Hue, the further we stepped into the Indianized world, leaving the sinicized realm [of annam] behind us in the distance”.(Pham Quynh, ‘du-lich xu Lao’, Nam Phong, January 1931, no. 158, p. 7 and Pham Quynh, ‘impressions du Laos’, France-Indochine, no. 3388, 13 February 1931, p. 1.)²

Most of the migrants to Vietnam were Tamils from the French colony of Pondicherry and Karikal in south India. Indians migrated in the late 19th century in search of a better life or as civil servants and staff for the French colony. Indians migrating came from varied backgrounds and included low to middle ranking Civil Servants, South Indian business people, unskilled South Indian labourers, Gujarati

and Sindhi merchants from Mumbai (then Bombay), Sikhs and other Punjabis who worked as security guards and shop owners.³ An in depth study by Natasha Pairaudeau reveals the existence of a strong Indian community in Vietnam, hailing from various backgrounds and providing the essential man power and investment required for the sustenance of the French authorities in Vietnam. Essentially Indians who migrated to Vietnam did so out of free will and pursued a number of economic professions ranging from labourers to attorneys and lawyers.

“Indians living in Cochin-china who were not French citizens fell into one of two categories. If they originated from the French Establishments in India but had chosen not to renounce their personal status, they remained French subjects, albeit with a status distinct from the French subjects’ native to Cochin-china. They were sometimes called ‘non renouncers’ (non-renongants). Migrants originating from parts of India under British rule were classified in Cochin-china, with the Chinese, as ‘Foreign Asians’. However, for some purposes, neither they nor the Indian French subjects were legally ‘Asian’.”⁴

The Indian migrants from the French colonies in India held a different status vis a vis the British subjects in India, as they had a chance to become French citizens. Natives of French India could become citizens by declaring themselves ‘renounced’ of their personal laws and stood at an advantage as compared to natives of Cochin-china for whom obtaining French citizenship was a difficult and arduous task.⁵ The ‘renouncers’ and Indian French

subjects who came to become the backbone of the colonial French administration and economy in Vietnam.

Occupations and jobs related to the French administration were given to the 'renouncers' who settled mostly in Saigon.⁶ "From the beginnings of the French conquest of Cochin china, and throughout the period of French rule, the demand for French-speaking subordinate and middle-level functionaries in Cochin china's colonial administration was met in part by Tamils from the French of Pondicherry and Karikal. Indians were also employed as functionaries elsewhere in IndochinaMany Indians working for the Cochin chinese administration were hired in posts normally reserved for Europeans, on European terms and with European salaries {a titre europeen, a solde d'Europe). These tended to be middle-ranking positions requiring a mastery of French."⁷

The migrating Indians were mainly employed as clerks and accountants upto the Second World War '. Amongst these the 'Writers' were among the earliest Indian functionaries to arrive in Cochin china followed by clerks and accountants employed in many branches of the service.⁸ Other areas of administration where Indians were employed by the French authorities included colonial customs, revenue and registration. As per records all three tax inspectors employed in Cochin-china's treasury in the 1880s were Indian French citizens and in the Registration service Indians were employed as clerks, registrars, and bailiffs. The 'renouncers' constituted, one third of the clerks in Saigon's Court of Appeal, in the Saigon Tribunal and three out of eleven judges (judges suppliants) within the Court of Appeal in 1938 were also Indians. In addition to this, nine out of thirteen provincial tribunals were Indian clerk of court or appeal judges.⁹

The Indian 'renouncers' also found employment in postal and public services such lighthouses and railways. Their employment in Lighthouse services is indicated by records of 1897 wherein nine out sixteen names are Tamil. Indians also functioned as overseers of various construction works such as railways. A case in example being Gnanadicom Saverinaden, who in 1908 oversaw the building of

embankments on the main line trans-Indochina line. They also were crucial links in the development of Saigon since they undertook major public works as contractors. Samy Appassamy, a renouncer¹⁰ who made a fortune during "the building boom of the 1920s" and in the 1900s, his contracts involved provision of petrol lighting to public buildings. Xavier de Condappa, presumably taking over from Samy, undertook petrol lighting for the city of Saigon from 1908 -1911,¹¹ and other contracts undertaken by Tamils included wood supply for heating to local administrations, and food to prisoners and college students."¹²

In the field of transport Indians worked as conductors, guards, and other general employees. In the arena of security they were employed as policemen, prison guards and other agents of security and surveillance. For instance, records show that Indians constituted half of the agents in the Saigon Municipal Force in 1908 and nine of a total of 17 prison guards on the prison island of Poulo Condore in 1917 (and another seven had Corsican names). They were also employed by Cochin-china's Security Service (Surete) and two guards, Sarny Beamont and Saverinaden Dupas, were awarded medals of honour.¹³

The possibility of employment in varied branches of French administration proved to be an impetus for numerous Indians to migrate to colonial Cochin-china. The immense influx of migrants became a cause of concern for the authorities in Cochin china during the 1890s with regard to cost of repatriation that "in 1908 the Cochin-chinese Governor Outrey asked his superior in Hanoi to advise the Governor for French India (as well as high officials in Reunion and Corsica) that 'there are no available jobs in the service in Cochin-china in the foreseeable future' and that those hopeful of employment in the public service were to be discouraged from coming."¹⁴ Despite this the migration of Indians continued and as per records even in the 1920's a number of them functioned as magistrates, legal clerks, and bailiffs.¹⁵

Indians were employed in eleventh Colonial Infantry Regiment (R.I.C.) posted in Saigon and Indians who could speak, read and write in French

served as those in charge with managing the stores of the colonial troops.¹⁶ “The French troops stopped to draw supplies at the ports of Pondicherry and Karikal. Indians are known to have joined them aboard their ships, coming to serve as soldiers in the conquest of Cochin-china, and the other Indochinese territories as they were brought under French ‘protection’. Some of these soldiers stayed on and settled. Mougamadoucamy (or Mamoucani in the Vietnamese rendering of his name) wrote in barely literate French in 1902 to appeal to colonial authorities for financial help, he described how, originally from Karikal, he had arrived in the colony in 1852, ‘comine simpelle solda a la guer Saigon [sic]’ (‘as a simple soldier in the fight for Saigon’).”¹⁷

Besides government jobs a number of Indians were employed by French firms as accountants and in other subordinate positions. “The colonial directory of 1913 lists several French trading houses with Indians in their employ.¹⁸ By the 1930s, Indians were employed as accountants in a wide variety of European firms and organisations, from banks to oil companies to department stores to professional associations.” These posts were open to non-renouncers such as the Hindu Reddiar caste who tended not to renounce, and carried a reputation in Pondicherry of being ‘good accountants’. A number of Indians also found employment as staff of various newspaper and printing presses that came up during the 1920’s.¹⁹

South Indian traders established shops in various cities and smaller towns and sold imported cloth, as also they stocked garments and general supplies required by the ever increasing Tamil population. “The Cochin-chinese trade, concentrated in the larger urban centres, supported the growing cities of Saigon and Cholon, as well as Gia Dinh, Saigon’s north-western extension. South Indian Muslim had also flourished in the rice growing regions and their transport hubs in the Mekong Delta (My Tho, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, Sa Dec, Rach Gia) and Thu Dau Mot, the centre of rubber production, reflecting their role in bringing supplies to the expanding agricultural frontier.”²⁰ In this aspect of economic activity it was the Indians from British controlled areas of

India that were predominant. The two exceptions were the Saigon-based Koothanallur firm of J.M.M. Ishmael Brothers and the powerful Pondicherry firm of G.M. Said (also spelled Syed or Saed), with interests centred in Hanoi and across Tonkin. “These larger firms also generated employment for lower classes of overseas Tamils as their shopkeepers, cashiers, and servants. South Indian Muslims from the French possessions made up a disproportionate number of employees, as well as petty traders or agents”.²¹ The Indian Muslims in Saigon were also active in the diamond trade and financial services which not included only money lending but also services that helped Indians transfer money back to India as they were involved in money lending.²² An interesting profession recorded are the Tamil tailors whose shops were often located in streets adjacent to areas where the cloth merchants conducted their trade in Saigon. These Tamil tailors carried cloth and goods into the remote areas of Cochin-china along the riverine routes.²³

Another trade that was dominated by Indians was the cattle trade which provided for the transportation and diary needs of the French colony. “Cochin-china Yearbook (Annuaire de la Cochinchine) of 1865 reads: The 200 Indians whom we possess [que nous possedons] have managed to make themselves useful, and it is desirable that their numbers increase. Thanks to them the care of livestock is seen to, numerous carts [chariots] circulate, and some carriages for hire [voitures de louage].”²⁴ They provided transport and labour for early French urban construction projects and for the development of public transport in colonial Cochin china. Tirouvingadame signed a contract in 1869 to provide bullock carts to the Civil Works department, and other livestock related contracts included the provision of animal feed and milk.²⁵ Tamils sold milk door-to-door and in a list of ‘merchants of milk’ dating to 1884, twenty-six Tamil names in Saigon, and seven in Cholon were recorded.²⁶

In addition to cloth, other items that were sold in shops during the 1920s and 1930s included Indian spices and specially prepared Tamil foodstuffs. Associated with the gastronomical needs of the

growing Tamil population was the development of professions and trade such as the pressing of sesame and peanut for oil (carried out on the outskirts of Saigon) and preparation rice and tamarind by Tamil methods. “Lagraniere street in particular, which by the First World War had come to be the preferred place of residence of many Indians employed in the administration, attracted importers of Tamil foodstuffs and restaurants serving Indian food.”²⁷

The Muslim Tamil traders created their own enclaves in Saigon and already in the 1880’s were found concentrated in the rue Vannier near to the Saigon River, and in 1908 nearly two thirds of rue Vannier was occupied by Tamil cloth merchants, moneychangers or ‘retail vendors’. The other streets were the Vienot, street which was an important centre of Tamil trade, and the Catinat Street block which was the hub of the Indian money changers,²⁸ and the Ohier Street which was occupied by Chettys, Indian policemen, a dry goods merchant (epicier) Mouttou, three Tamil jewellers (Souppayapatter, Kamatchy and Aroquiassamy) and it also had a petrol station and residence of a wealthy renouncer businessman Sarny Appassamy.²⁹

Indians were also amongst the rich land owning class in Vietnam. Saigon based merchant M.M. Ishmael, acquired property along with his brother Mohamed Abdoullah in the interwar years estimated at 891,000 piastres with an annual income of 111,328 piastres in 1933. These consisted of blocks of compartments, commercial properties and empty lots on ten different streets in central Saigon.³⁰ Savericom Prouchandy owned compartments and vacant lots in Saigon and Cap St Jacques (Vung Tau) during late 1920’s.³¹

The entrepreneur Nagalingapouille owned a large lot bordering the Chettiar temple on Ohier Street in 1881. In the 1920s, the holdings of the milk merchant Palamiappadevar (alternately Pajaniappathevar) brought a monthly rental income of 6,000 piastres). Kathiappadevar or Kattheappathevar, owned property with rental of 2,500 piastres monthly. A moneylender by the name of Appapouille, owned massive tracts of land in Gia Binh and Go Vap provinces and to Nadimouttoupouille and Varadappouille property had

been ‘bequeathed by Pajaniappathevar in his will of 4 November, 1922’.³²

“Right from the 1860s, Tamils of Pondicherry were attracted by the employment and trade prospects in the French colony of Indo-China, composed of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Many migrated, especially to Saigon. There were other Indians, hailing from British India who also found their way to Saigon and Indochina. They were mostly the Hindu Nattukottai, and Tamil-speaking Muslims. In 1937 there were about 6000 Indians in Indochina. Most of them were Tamils.”³³

2. Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore’s visit to Vietnam was made possible primarily due to French authorities and the French educated Indians residing in Vietnam. Their objective behind extending an invitation to Tagore was “the plan to restore the “declining native Powers!” – or Indianess and Asianess.”³⁴ “The reception of Tagore, which appears to be religion-, morality- and Indian-oriented, might have been controlled by the powerful political discourses attempted to discourage Indochina from the revolutionary ideologies coming from China and Japan”.³⁵

Even prior to Tagore’s visit a number of articles and writings pertaining to him were published in Vietnam. Nguyễn An Ninh in article, entitled ‘La Sagesse du cochon’ (Wisdom of the Animal) praised Tagore for his thoughts about Brahma and human harmony. The 24 March 1924 edition of *La Cloche Fêlée* carried a reprint of “Rab Tagore est Attendu en Chine,” which enumerated on Tagore’s reception by Chinese students, Tagore’s speech on refusing the title “Sir” and the patriotic activities of Tagore.³⁶

The Tonkin journal *Nam Phong tạp chí* published articles pertaining to Tagore upon news of his visit to Saigon. Volumes 83 and 84 of 1924 contained the articles ‘Một nhà đại thi sĩ Ấn Độ: ông R. Tagore’ (The Great Indian Poet: Mr. Rabindranath Tagore) and the quốc ngữ version of Tagore’s speech, ‘Declaration of the East,’ ; Volumes 93 and 94 contained the article ‘Đất châu Á mới – hai nhân vật – hai sự nghiệp’ (The New Asian Land – Two Characters – Two Careers) by Sylvain Lévi, who was

the first foreign lecturer at Visva-Bharata and who had a “really intimate [relationship] with Tagore and his circle” (Tagore, Selected Letters 353).³⁷

“A large amount of announcements and articles about Tagore and his visit found a place in both French and quốc ngữ newspapers in Saigon including *L'Écho annamite*, *Tribune Inchinoise*, *Đông Pháp thời báo*, *La Cloche Fêlée*, *Thần Chung*, *Công giáo đồng thịnh*, *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, and *Phụ nữ tân văn*. Among these magazines and newspapers, *Tribune Inchinoise* and *Đuốc Nhà Nam* were the official mouthpieces about the event, as their founders, respectively Bùi Quang Chiêu (1872-1945) and Dương Văn Giáo (1900-1945), were members of the official Welcome Committee.”³⁸

Rabindranath Tagore sailed for India in a French postal boat, S.S. Angers and reached Saigon at 11:30 am on 21 June 1929. The Welcome Committee in Saigon mainly constituted representatives of the French colonial administration- the Honory president, M. Béziat; the President, Bùi Quang Chiêu; French-Vice President, Monribo; Hindu Vice President, Xavier; Treasurer, Nguyễn Văn Cùa; and Secretary, Lê Trung Nghĩa. Arrangements for his stay involved the combined work of the colonial counselor Diệp Văn Giáp who provided a large villa at 35 Barbier Street for stay, the government which provided the cars and the “Bombay people” who were responsible for his food.³⁹

As shown by Chi P Pham’s in depth study of Tagore’s visit to Vietnam, his itinerary was pre-determined by his hosts and was planned down to detail with a focus on cultural and traditional activities. In addition to visits to indigenous, Chinese and Indian places of worship (the Tomb Lê Văn Duyệt, Pagoda Cantonese, Chetty Pagoda), his itinerary included attending events organised to promote art and religion such as visit to the l’Ecole de poterie (College of Fine Art) in Biên Hòa, attending the cinema with films about the cultures of Tonkin and the opening function of the Institute of poetry, Murugananda Vasagasala.⁴⁰

Tagore desired to travel to Angkor but was unable to do so then as the French Embassy instructed

Saigon to abstain from including a visit to Angkor in Tagore’s programme.⁴¹ In most of his speeches Tagore “seems to have tried to make Annamite people more aware of their culture and used his rhetorical figures and his poetic speech to touch upon some Annamite sensitivity for losing beautiful traditions.”⁴²

In the speech given at the welcoming ceremony, Tagore requested people see him as:

“A messenger of passing opportunities. Although I stand outside your door, I am seeking a place in your hearts. At this moment, please accept me even in the situation that the flourishing age [of Indian civilization in Annam] is blurred, the light of happiness being together [India and Annam] is losing.”⁴³

“I bring you the greetings of that radiant India, who lavished her light on this land as well as the message of sympathy and brotherhood of present India who lives separated from you by geographic distance and by the dead solitude of her own darkness” said Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Saigon in 1929.⁴⁴

Tagore: “Looking back into several centuries, I am dreaming of a time in (India), which is still flowing strongly in my blood. Today I am bringing to you evidence of the time when our cultures met together through documents, archives and art works to awaken your spirit. The time (of India in Annam) became ominous and was buried in several pages of historiography; that period is like a sapphire which was dissolved because of time, and left a beautiful but dried box of old hints behind...The Indian soul was once vital under the sunny sights of beaches of this area. The ancient Indian is here; India brought many thinkers to convey beautiful ideas to this area. The soul of India is still in my mind; it seems like I was walking around the countryside of my hometown, which is at the very momentum of disappearance.”⁴⁵

The lost Indian/Asian values that Tagore looked for in Annam seems to have been Buddhism and religiosity and in the course of his trip he was pre occupied with thoughts of visiting Angkor which

symbolised the presence of the ancient Indian culture in Southeast Asia. On his arrival at Nhà Bè port, Tagore expressed his desire to visit Angkor Wat and he agreed to visit Eden Cinema in the belief that he would see films about Angkor Wat. To his disappointment the films were about the cultures and landscapes of Tonkin and the films on Angkor Wat were said to be ruined due to humidity. His interest in Buddhism is evident in the conversations he had with the Governor-General Pierre Pasquier (1928-34) and on 24 June he “expressed his special interest in the connections between poetry and religion and his love for the peaceful environment of Buddhist pagodas.”⁴⁶ These interaction and conversations with a focus on Buddhism had fruitful results as the Governor of Indochina signed a decree that led to the establishment of an institute for teaching and studying Buddhism and moral lessons in Cochin China.⁴⁷

On his day of arrival a second reception was organized at Theatre Principal where “As soon as Tagore entered the theatre, the audience seem[ed] to stop breathing... when listening to Tagore’s speech, the audience was so quiet that the sounds of flying mosquitoes was audible.” At this reception even prior to Rabindranath’s speech, three speeches were delivered- ‘Présentation du Rabindra Nath Tagore’ ‘Address A. Ranbindra Nath Tagore’, and ‘Traduction de l’ allocution de Rabindra Nath Tagore’, by Bùi Quang Chiêu, Dương Văn Giáo and Trần Văn Trị, respectively. The English speech of Tagore had been translated before the meeting; a French translation was read by Jacques Đức, and the quốc ngữ translation by Hồ Văn Nguon.⁴⁸

Tagore met the governor of Cochin China on the second day and he asked for some books about Indochina for his university. Thereafter he was accompanied by Jean Kerjean (secretary of Court de’ Appel and interpreter), Trần Văn Kha (colonial counselor), Trần Khắc Nương (delegate of the Municipal Council), Tamby (cadastral commissioner), Hồ Văn Nguon (representative of Annamite journalists), and several Hindu people on his visit to L’ Ecole de poterie (College of Fine Art) in Biên Hòa . Tagore took much interest while

being guided, by the chief of Biên Hòa province and the director of the college, through classes and showrooms. He saw the artistic works in ceramic and bronze and he particularly liked the white stone vases with painted yellow flowers. Tagore purchased a ceramic vase and two lampshades for his students in Santiniketan and signed the visitors’ book of the College. There after he visited the tomb of Lê Văn Duyệt, a 19th Century mandarin who had rescued Christian missionaries, where Annamite music was played to welcome him. Being tired from the journey to Biên Hòa Tagore did not attend the tea party at the site, but attended the big champagne party in the Union Printing House held in his honour. Nguyễn Văn Cùa the district chief and owner of Printing House, had a collection of ancient artistic items and offered the model of an Annamite battleship which was lacquered in red and trimmed with gold as a gift to Tagore. The photographer Khánh Kì took two photos of Tagore in Cùa’s company. Later in the evening Tagore visited the Eden Cinema in Saigon.⁴⁹

His interaction with the Indian community in Saigon took place on the third day of his visit when he visited the Catinat Street where was guided during his exploration of several Bombay shops and one Annam textile shop by Wastamull, the owner of one of the Bombay textile stores, while. Tagore took an interest in the textiles and not only bought a piece of Annam brocade, but also keenly observed the weaving and dyeing of a piece of satin by Annamites. On his third day he wore Annamite tunic stitched by the tailor Trần Thái Nguyên on Tagore’s request. His dress constituted a bright brocade shirt, white silk trousers, Gia Định shoes, and a crepe hat made Tagore. ⁵⁰ “Saigon people were interested in and surprised at the offer Tagore had made; he wanted to take a walk on Saigon streets in Annam dress... Immediately the next morning, on the crowded streets of Saigon, there was a big Indian with white hair and beard and dressed in a Vietnamese bright brocade tunic, white silk trousers, Gia Định shoes, and crepe hat walking peacefully; he looked as if he was a real Saigoner.”⁵¹

The other two events attended by Tagore were a reception hosted by the Chinese Chamber at the

Pagoda Cantonese on Cây Mai Street in Cholon and a religious ceremony at a Chetty temple. In the former Tagore conversed with members of the Chamber regarding the significance of Chinese knowledge for India as well as Asia. At the Chetty temple, “A group of Indians came to the Chamber’s reception and brought Tagore and his companions in a car decorated with flowers to the Pagoda for Lễ nhất châu diên Viện tàng thơ Murugananda Vasagasala [the opening ceremony of the Institute of Poetry Murugananda Vasagasala]. Tagore was invited to lead the ceremony along with Bùi Quang Chiêu and Lefebvre, Vice-President of Saigon. Garlands were offered to Tagore, Chiêu and Lefebvre; other members of the Welcome Committee were offered a flower. A girl named Kathéappa Thévarvin chanted a song by Passecarane, an Indian poet, to honor Tagore. The Indians gave Tagore a gift of 2101 piastre, which were placed in the middle of a tray of betel leaves.”⁵²

Post Tagore’s departure a number of articles and books pertaining to him and writings continued to be published which were non-political in nature. “The intellectuals of Saigon’s moderate newspapers intensively embellished the essence of religiousness and the morality embodied by Tagore. They tended to gaze at Tagore, himself, as the essence of the Oriental and promoted cultural similarities between Indian culture embodied by Tagore and Annamites to indicate that India is Annam’s cultural and moral root.”⁵³

Phụ nữ tân văn published an article about Santiniketan of Tagore on 30 October 1930, in which he criticized the old teaching methods of Vietnam and alternative methodologies resembling those at Santiniketan, such as studying in the open air were suggested.⁵⁴ The weekly French-Quốc ngữ bilingual journal *Đông Dương tạp chí* printed quốc ngữ versions of short stories by Tagore and included ‘My Fair Neighbor’, a Short Story Written in English by the Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore (17 July 1937) and ‘Suba’, a Short Story by the Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore (24 July, 1937) which were translated from French.⁵⁵ The book *Thi hào Tagore* is the most exhaustive work written on Tagore is *Nhà đại biểu văn hóa Á Đông (The Real Poet – R.*

Tagore – The Representative of the East) by Nguyễn Văn Hải (Tân Việt Publishing House, 1942). It has five chapters which discuss in detail Rabindranath Tagore’s life, career and thoughts. These constitute- Chapter 1 Bengali Renaissances which discusses cultural traditions and political situations of Bengal that influenced Tagore’s poetry; Chapter 2- The Cradle of a Genius speaks of how family and education influenced Tagore’s career; Chapter 3 - Poems of Tagore is about Tagore’s views on poetry; Chapter 4- Thoughts of Tagore delves into Tagore’s thoughts on devotion to humanity, the relations between humans and the universe, humans and God, and Eastern culture and Western civilization; Chapter 5- The Institute of Peace is on Tagore’s policies on his international institute of peace, Santiniketan; and the last part of the book lists Tagore’s works in Bengali and French.⁵⁶

According to Pham, “Writings and visual descriptions of Tagore, translations of Tagore’s literary works and even photographs were mostly imagined and illusionary, and focused intensely on Tagore’s penetrating gaze and his eyes, rather than explicating his speeches.⁵⁷...During the Tagore’s visit, the audience focused more on Tagore’s appearance than his speech. Tagore appears not to have talked much or shared much during his visit to Saigon; his voice seems to have been sunk under programmed speeches of the committee. For example, at the reception of Tagore at Hôtel de Ville on June 21 ...Tagore appears to have been silent while there were continuous speeches by the honored host Béziat and by representatives of Annamite, Hindu and French journals and governmental offices.”⁵⁸

3. Travel by Indian and Vietnamese Leaders in the 1950’s

In the political arena even though contact between political leaders occurred in early part of the 20th century, it is during the 1950’s that a number of state delegations from India and Vietnam visited each other’s countries. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru as well as Ho Chi Minh were keen on the support and co-operation amongst Asian nations under colonial rule.

Gokhale, who examined the origin and development of Nehru's vision of Asia, is of opinion that the concepts of Nationalism and Asianism... remained constant in his thought for over half a century.⁵⁹ Asianism of Nehru has been characterized as 'pacifist and benevolent', which differs from the somewhat aggressive Pan-Asianism of Japan⁶⁰ and was 'tempered with realism' as argued by Datta-Ray.⁶¹

The idea of pan Asianism found roots among leaders of the Congress during the 1920s such as Chittaranjan Das, Srinivasa Iyengar, Mukhtar Ansari. They believed in promoting a federation or union of Asian nations that were under colonial rule. Chittaranjan Das's Swaraj Party had as one of its programmes the formation of a Pan-Asiatic Federation.⁶² Srinivasa Iyengar at Guwahati on December 1926 stated: "The time has perhaps come for us seriously to think of a Federation of Asiatic peoples for their common welfare... We have too long neglected the possibilities of a cultural and business union with all Asiatic Countries."⁶³

The Brussels International Congress against Imperialism attended by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1927 seems to have been the motivation behind his idea of the formation of an Asian federation. The League against Imperialism Conference in the Egmont Palace in Brussels, Belgium, on February 10, 1927, attended by 175 delegates, of which 107 came from 37 countries under colonial rule.⁶⁴ Even though Nehru and other Asian delegates had a 'strong desire' for establishment of some Asiatic federation and closer bond among Asian countries,⁶⁵ but Nehru 'could not understand how an effective Asiatic organization could be built up'⁶⁶ and thus he and the other Asian delegates decided that it was 'premature to talk of any special Asiatic organization'.⁶⁷ It is from the meeting between Nehru and Ho Chi Minh during this Congress that close relations between India and Vietnam were established.

"The Indian independence movement had its impact on the independent movements of the neighbouring countries including Indochina. Indian nationalists' evinced keen interest in the nationalist activities of the neighbouring Asian countries. The

Indian national leaders perceived the anti-colonial struggle in Southeast Asia as indivisible from their own freedom struggle against colonialism. Nehru was convinced that the future of India could not be separated from the future of Asia particularly Southeast Asia."⁶⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru recommended to the Indian National Congress to invite delegations from other countries to discuss common issues and on a few occasions nationalists from Vietnam attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress,⁶⁹ such as Gieu who attended the Calcutta session of Indian National congress.⁷⁰

Subhas Chandra Bose attended the Assembly of Greater East-Asiatic Nations held in Tokyo in November 1943 as the Head of the Provisional Government of Free India'.⁷¹ And saw the establishment of GACPS is of 'vital interest', and emphasized the significance of the GACPS for the entire Asian people and the role of India as the more than a bridge between East and West Asia. Subhas Bose believed that the establishment of the GACPS would pave the way for a Pan-Asiatic Federation.⁷²

The Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh was keen to use regional cooperation to further the cause of Vietnamese independence⁷³ and in September 1945, Ho Chi Minh expressed his interest in the creation of a 'pan-Asiatic community' comprising Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaya, Burma, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines (China, Japan, and Korea were not included in Ho's vision of an Asiatic community).

The great leader Nguyen Ai Quoc wrote many articles on India and in 1921 he published his first article about India, 'Revolutionary Movement in India'⁷⁴ (in *La Revue Communiste* of August and September 1921, No. 18-19)⁷⁵ and other articles included *English 'Colonization'* (in *La Vie Ouvriere*, 9 November 1923); *Letter from India* (March 1928); *Workers' Movement in India* (April 1928); *Indian Peasants* (April 1928); *Peasant and Workers Movements in India* (May 1928). "Through events, with figures on the number of movements, number of Indian workers and peasants participating in the struggle against the atrocious oppression and exploitation of British colonialists, the content of

Nguyen Ai Quoc's articles expressed sympathy and deep concern for the patriotic movement, the Freedom Struggle of the people of India."⁷⁶

Ho Chi Minh wrote, "O the children of India! Please stand up and unite! Homeland needs all you people!"⁷⁷ He wrote a poem in Han, from prison in Guangxi, on Jawaharlal Nehru. "To Nehru" - a poem that Ho Chi Minh wrote on Nehru in his "Prison Diary" in 1942-1943:

To Nehru

I am struggling, you are active

You are in Jail, I am in prison

Ten thousand miles apart, we have not met

We communicate without words.

Shared ideas link you and me

What we lack is personal encounter

I am jailed by a neighbouring friend

*You are chained and fettered by the enemy.*⁷⁸

Ho Chi Minh wrote a series of articles in International Press Correspondence, on Indian struggle for independence from 1924 to 1931.⁷⁹ Nehru and Ho Chi Minh exchanged letters during the 1940's wherein they were "trying to project each other's countries problems".⁸⁰ The Vietnamese people showed profound sympathy and supported the freedom struggle in India. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were held in high esteem by the Vietnamese people. During the World War-II, the Vietnamese helped Indian independence movement led by Subash Chandra Bose.⁸¹ The developments in Indochina after the Second World War received the attention of Indian Nationalist leaders. A contingent of Indian soldiers from the Twentieth Indian division were amongst the British troops, sent to Saigon in late September 1945 to disarm the Japanese. The All India Congress Committee in December at the Calcutta meeting passed a resolution declaring that "any support from any quarter to imperialist designs in Indonesia, Indochina, and elsewhere, is resented throughout Asia..." (Background of India's Foreign policy, p.90) In November 1946, Nehru successfully blocked an attempt to organize a volunteer brigade

to fight against the French colonial forces.⁸² Sarat Chandra Bose, urged Indians to fight side by side with the Indochinese against the French troops and he viewed the struggle of Indochina as part of the Asiatic struggle for freedom from Western domination and called on the Indians to "rush to the rescue" of the Vietnamese forces, to join as volunteers in their "thousands and tens of thousands", and to assist the heroic Indochine.⁸³ (*The Times*, London, 4 January, 1947).

On 2 September 1946 an interim government headed by Nehru was formed in India which sided with Indochina's struggle for freedom. In 1946, Ho-Chi-Minh sent a representative to Delhi with the aim of winning the sympathy of the Indian leaders for "the Vietnam Republican government's cause, condemning French policy in Indochina, blocking the work of the French purchasing mission in New Delhi, and preventing the repair of French planes and the refuelling of French ships. These requests were met by Nehru, but only partially. On 18 February 1947, Nehru stated in the Legislative Assembly that the government of India shared the feeling of public opinion in India in favour of Vietnam and the freedom of the people of Indochina, and was anxious not to be a party in any way to any action which might be prejudicial to their interests. He disclosed that the government had taken steps to limit the number of French aircraft which might fly across India, and to exercise stricter control in the future."⁸⁴

'Vietnam Day' was observed by students in India on 21 January 1947 to show their solidarity with Vietnam and on this day demonstrations before the French Consulate in Bombay and Calcutta were held with slogans resounding with the call for the withdrawal of French troops from Indochina.⁸⁵ Indian volunteers were recruited by Congress members in Pondicherry⁸⁶, and S.A. Dange, vice-president of the all India Trade Union Congress, called on the docker's union to boycott French ships calling at Indian ports carrying troops and arms to and from Indochina.⁸⁷ At Calcutta, demonstrations by students turned into riots and the police had to use tear gas and open fire to disperse the demonstrators. In this riot, 19 students were wounded by bullets, 50 injured

by lathi charges, and 500 arrested.⁸⁸ (*The Times*, 22 January 1947)

Nehru as the Vice-President of the Executive Council of the interim government undertook the task to organize and host a conference of Asian countries in India. The purpose of holding the conference was the discussion of problems of mutual interest like economic development, freedom movements, migration and racial problems, and the status of woman. The Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi from 23rd March to 2nd April, 1947, which was of great importance and event of 'considerable historic significance' for him.⁸⁹ It was attended by two hundred and forty three delegates from twenty eight countries.⁹⁰ Nehru stated: "We have no designs against anybody; ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world. For too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancellories. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own legs and to co-operate with all others who are prepared to co-operate with us. We do not intend to be the playthings of others."⁹¹ The plenary session of the conference decided to set up an Asian Relations Organization with a Provisional General Council and also academies for promotion of Asian studies. Nehru at his speech in the Asian Relations Conference emphasized that "The idea of having an Asian Conference is not new and many have thought of it. ...the idea of such a Conference arose simultaneously in many minds and in many countries of Asia."⁹²

In Nehru's words the first Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi was an "expression of the deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination."⁹³

Representatives of both Ho Chi Minh and Bao Dai attended the Asian Relation Conference in March 1947 and Ho Chi Minh's representative asked for material, political and moral support. Nehru, was cautious in his approach to the problems of Indochina States and at the time did not give formal recognition to either of the government in Indochina region.⁹⁴

But at the same time the government and the people of India extended full sympathy to the Vietnamese independence struggle and in December 1946 Nehru stated to the France that "Our hearts are with the people of Indochina. The attempt to crush the spirit of freedom in Indochina has deeply moved the Indian people... Though it is difficult for Indians to know the facts of the conflict, one thing is patent that foreign armed forces are trying to crush Vietnam".⁹⁵

Ho-Chi-Minh's representative, Pham Ngoc-Thach, came to Delhi in April 1948 and was received by prominent Indian leaders, including Mr. Rajendra Prasad, Mr. V. Patel, and Nehru. A non-official mission headed by N. Pillai had been sent to Saigon on 22 February 1948.⁹⁶ Two other attempts were made by the Ho-Chi-Minh government in 1950 to win Indian recognition, but they also failed.⁹⁷

On the other hand "When Bao-Dai's representative came to seek recognition for his government in January 1950, no arrangement was made for a meeting of him with Mr. Nehru. When Mr. Nehru was asked at a press conference in Delhi on January 6, 1950, whether the government of India had received any request for recognition from the Vietnam government, and what Bao-Dai's representative was doing in Delhi, he replied he was not sure if any formal request had been made, but that certainly some kind of informal approaches have taken place". He repeated, however, that "our policy is not to give official recognition in Indochina to any government". Nehru said. "Whatever he wants to do, he has come here in his private capacity and officially he is not accredited to us, no do we recognise him in any capacity".⁹⁸

Nehru declared that the developments in Indochina were of "grave concern and grievous significance" to his country, and "The maintenance of the independence and sovereignty of Asian countries as well as the end of colonial and foreign rule are essential, he said, for the prosperity of Asian peoples and for the peace of the world"⁹⁹ We only seek to keep ourselves and others, particularly our neighbours, he affirmed, to a policy of peace and of non-alignment in world tensions and wars".¹⁰⁰

Nehru was the first foreign leader to visit Hanoi on the establishment of the separate North Vietnamese state in October 1954 and his public embrace of Ho Chi Minh reportedly provided him “incalculable prestige.”¹⁰¹

The government of India adopted a policy of non-involvement in Indochina till 1954 when the conflict between France and the Viet-Minh and presence great powers, notably the USA and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), changed India’s position with regard to Vietnam. The fighting at Dien Bien Phu and American plans to launch the ‘United Action Plan’ in association with France and Great Britain led Nehru to give up non-involvement in the region and appealed for a cease-fire and put forward six-point proposal which formed the basis of negotiations.¹⁰² The suggestions put forward by Mr. Nehru as a basis for a peace settlement in Indochina contained the following points: 1) a climate of peace and conciliation; 2) a cease-fire; 3) independence for the three states; 4) direct negotiations between the parties immediately and principally concerned; 5) non-intervention; and 6) informing the United Nations and using its good offices¹⁰³. The Geneva conference to resolve was held from 9 May to 21 July 1954 and even though India was not officially a part of it, “Without India it would have been difficult to establish an indirect dialogue between the opposite camps”. V K Krishna Menon was sent on behalf of the Indian Government and he arrived in Geneva on 23 April. Though initially Nehru planned to stay there for a few days, it was not before for three weeks that he returned.¹⁰⁴

Menon explained: “we did not stand on dignity, we just stood on the door step and we tried to be helpful.”¹⁰⁵ Sar Desai, a Southeast Asian specialist, observes: “From the position of an out cast at the Geneva conference, India had moved to occupy the crucial position of a custodian entrusted with the supervision of Geneva settlement over Indochina”.¹⁰⁶ Pierre Mendes-France, the Prime Minister of France, spoke of the conference as “this ten power conference - nine at the table - and India”. “In the days following the Agreement, India tried to make China and North Vietnam repeatedly commits themselves to the

principles of peaceful co-existence and thus tried to allay the fears of the non-communist countries in South-East Asia. This was all the more necessary because of the establishment of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), whose primary aim was to prevent the spread of communism in the region.”¹⁰⁷

The conference resulted in the division of Vietnam into North and South Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. The Vietnamese troops were to vacate Laos and Cambodia and provision was made for the concentration of Pathet Lao troops in the two North-Eastern provinces of Laos pending a political settlement. The division of Vietnam was provisional and in July 1956 the elections were to be held in Vietnam after re-unification. No foreign troops were to be stationed or bases established and that the countries of Indochina would not ask for and join military alliances. India’s share of the ICSC personnel was overwhelming whereas Canada and Poland sent about 160 men out of which, Indian contingent numbered 1,086 on 25 March 1955.¹⁰⁸ In an answer to a question on the expenditure so far incurred by India on the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam, the Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, in a written reply stated in Lok Sabha on Sep 04, 1958 that the total expenditure incurred by India on the Commission since its inception up to May 1958, was Rs. 61,80,248.83. Out of this amount, Rs. 39,65,437.62 is recoverable from the Geneva Powers, being the expenditure incurred on their behalf. Nov 04, 1958.¹⁰⁹

In October 1954, Nehru visited Hanoi on his way to Peking and “he was received with great honor as a first dignitary to their country”.¹¹⁰ President Ho Chi Minh during a state banquet for the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said, “Today, the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam are happy to welcome Prime Minister Pandit Nehru, the beloved leader of the great India, a soldier who commits to peace in Asia and the world, our Vietnamese’ unshakeable good friend”¹¹¹. After the official visit of Prime Minister J. Nehru, the first pages of the history of beautiful Vietnam - India friendship opened.

In a conversation with the Chinese Premier Chou, Nehru talks of Ho Chi Minh and the Geneva Conference

Chou: Your Excellency must have talked with Ho Chi Minh. In our view every article of the Geneva Agreement must be implemented. We wish that the situation in Laos may be stabilized. We support its unity and hope that this will be useful for expanding areas of peace and India in its capacity as Chairman can expedite the implementation of this Agreement

Chou: Menon asked the question and I then told him that you would require between 500 to 1,000 persons. We can understand that it is difficult to spare so many officers. India has of course a very arduous task and we will always support you. We hope you will achieve more success.

Q: Could you tell us something about your talks with Dr Ho Chi Minh? JN: I had very friendly talks with Dr Ho Chi Minh. Primarily, they were concerned with the situation in Indo-China. Dr Ho assured me that they wanted to abide by the Geneva Agreements completely, and they would do so. We hope that this will result in friendly and satisfactory settlements between the powers concerned. Dr Ho expressed his friendliness to France and said that, in spite of past history, he would like to maintain friendly contacts with France. He also told us that the International Commission was functioning very well. In fact, till that time all the decisions of the International Commission, consisting of India, Canada and Poland, had been unanimous. Dr Ho also referred to Laos and Cambodia, and said that he would welcome their free and independent existence. He hoped to have friendly contacts with neighbouring countries, including Thailand. (Press conference, Beijing, 26 October 1954. From Jawaharlal: Nehru: Press Conferences 1954. Information Service of India, Government of India. New Delhi.)

Q: Would you describe Dr Ho Chi Minh as a man of peace?

JN: Dr Ho Chi Minh struck me not only very much as a man of peace, but as an extraordinarily likeable and friendly person.¹¹²

His experience in Vietnam is expressed in a letter to Edwina Mountbatten dated 2nd November 1954:

Hanoi had changed hands just five days before I arrived there and the Vietminh were in possession. Ho Chi Minh had not made his official entry, but he came down to see me. The city had a queer rather fearful look. The streets had been cleared, people sat on their thresholds, looking rather glum. But there were many Vietminh flags in the shops and houses. Ho Chi Minh produced an instant impression upon me, which was good. He is one of the most likeable men I have come across. He gives one the impression of integrity, goodwill and peace. His Foreign Minister and Vice Premier, Pham Dong, also struck me favourably. Not only in Hanoi but in the other states of Indo-China some of the communist or near-communist leaders I met were obviously superior in character and ability to the others who seemed to have no clear aim and who were unable even to cooperate with each other. There is no doubt that if there was an election now in Vietnam, there would be a tremendous majority in favour of Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam produced a completely opposite effect on me. The whole place seemed to be at sixes and sevens with hardly any dominant authority. The Prime Minister and his General were opposed to each other. There were three private armies of some kind of semi-religious sects. Foreign representatives apparently also pulled in different directions. It was generally estimated that if there was a vote now, ninety per cent or more of the population would vote for Vietminh. What would happen a year or two later, one could not say.¹¹³

Leaders of both North and South Vietnam visited India as well. In the case of South Vietnam, prior to visits by premiers of states steps were taken towards economic co-operation and trade agreements. In August 1956, a South Vietnamese mission headed by Nguyen-Huu Chau, secretary of state to the presidency came to Delhi which resulted in increased trade between the two countries -. India's exports to Vietnam jumped from Rs. 3,373,000 in 1956-57 to Rs. 9,649,00 in 1957, and again to Rs. 17,131,000 in 1958. Overall Indian exports to Indochina also increased from Rs. 1,275,000 in 1954-56 to

18,726,000 in 1957 and Rs. 23,830,000 in 1958.¹¹⁴ India was granted the benefit of the minimum tariff along with only nineteen other countries and the South Vietnam government requested India to send an expert to Vietnam to advise it on small savings. *The Hindustan Times* reported “The South Vietnam delegation led by Nguyen Huu Chau, ...has made considerable impression by the earnest by which its members have talked to the people concerned with trade and industry. Indian opinion is particularly amenable to the types of arguments used by Mr Nguyen Huu Chau. If South Vietnam is with the SEATO powers, it is because she wants security.... Their country is culturally linked with India, feels at ease with the Indian Government, which, it knows will not try to extend its political sway outside its frontiers.”¹¹⁵

The vice-president S. Radhakrishnan paid an official visit to Saigon in September 1957, and issued a statement wherein he was “impressed with the concern which the Government of Vietnam has for the welfare of the people”. President Ngo-Dinh-Diem was invited to visit India officially in November 1957 and president Ngo-Dinh-Diem “praised the work of the International Commission and expressed appreciation for India’s financial sacrifice in shouldering the burden of maintaining peace in Vietnam and assured that his government would do everything in its power to facilitate the “high mission” assumed by India in Vietnam. At the same time, he expressed his pleasure at the “confident” relations between his government and the International Commission, and thanked India for her continuing support of Vietnam during the ninth Colombo Conference and for her technical aid.”¹¹⁶

President Ngo Dinh Diem visited India on 4 November 1957 on the invitation by the Government of India. Ngo Dinh Nhu visited India from April 17 to 22 and was received by Nehru and V K Krishna Menon. Eight Indian Air force jets escorted him from Aligarh to Delhi by and he was given full civil and military honours appropriate to a visiting head of state of an important friendly country. A 21 gun salute, a guard of honour and a state drive along an eight mile route lined by the populace.¹¹⁷

Taya Zinkin, Delhi correspondent of *Le Monde*, wrote: “Of the visits of statesmen in India, that of Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem has been one of the most remarkable and the most successful... In Diem the Indians have discovered a nationalist and independent patriot”. *The Statesman* reported “Mr. Diem is undoubtedly among the more remarkable leaders thrown up by war and ferment in postwar Asia”. The *Hindustan Times* described Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem as “one of the heroes” of Asia, and *The Hindu* noted that president Diem’s statement that he was not joining SEATO and was thus not committing himself permanently to the power bloc system “will be warmly welcomed in this country which is anxious to see Indochina function as a fully independent State with its own democratic system.”¹¹⁸

In 1957 a number of technicians involved in Da Nhim project visited India to study Indian hydro electrical projects. In December 1958 an official delegation comprising Vu Van Thai (director general of budget and foreign aid), and Tran Van Chieu (President of the Saigon Chamber of Commerce) visited the India 1958 exhibit in New Delhi. In the same year two delegations visited South Vietnam from India-Indian Engineering Export Promotion Council and Indian Jute Mills Association.¹¹⁹ The Indian government agreed to the open a consulate-general of the Republic of Vietnam in Delhi. The government experts and technicians who had accompanied visited India’s industrial and agricultural projects and held discussions with members of India’s Planning Commission.

In March 1959, president Rajendra Prasad paid an official visit to Vietnam who praised president Ngo-Dinh Diem as one “who in his life exemplifies the energy and the building enthusiasm of the people to be free and to grow and prosper according to their genius”, and complimented the Vietnamese people for being “fortunate in her leadership who realise the importance of development and reconstruction at home and friendly cooperation with neighbouring countries”,¹²⁰ he also gifted a sapling of the Bodhi tree.

The South Vietnamese President Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem contributed humanitarian aid in the form

of rice to Tibetan Buddhist refugees in the late 1950s-early 1960s. According to an old *Chicago Tribune* dated 11 December, 1959, President Diem offered the Tibetan refugees with “surplus rice for a year.” Which amounted to 200 tons, according to Indian Parliament’s “Rajya Sabha Debates, 1952-2005,” and an article by Tran Trung Dao dated 30 August 2014) on *Dan Chim Viet online* notes that the President donated rice to the Tibetan Buddhist refugees through the Government of India not only twice and that the total amount of rice sent to India from South Vietnam during these two was 1,500 tons.¹²¹

At the invitation of the Government of India, His Excellency Dr. Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, visited India from Feb 05, 1958 to 13 February 1958. President Ho Chi Minh at the Gia Lam airport prior to departure said, “India is a very big country and Indian people are heroic. Previously, they were at the same colonial oppression as we were; people of India and Burma won national independence and now are on the building of their country. We are going to learn many valuable experiences through this visit. When return, we will tell you fellows and comrades, to learn from our brotherly nations.”¹²²

He was received at the airport by Nehru who spoke of him as “a great revolutionary and an almost legendary hero”.¹²³ This visit has been recorded in the Foreign Affairs Record of India- February 1958. On 6 February President Prasad held a State Banquet in honour of the distinguished visitor. Speaking on the occasion President Prasad said:

I have great pleasure in welcoming in our midst tonight His Excellency Dr. Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. We are very glad that His Excellency found it possible to visit this country in response to our invitation. In him we welcome a distinguished leader of men and a great fighter for freedom. India is a young Republic; we celebrated the 8th anniversary of our Republic only two weeks ago. Having remained under foreign domination for long years we know what a boon political emancipation is, and so our sympathies have

always been on the side of the countries struggling for freedom from foreign rule. We have followed with great interest and sympathy post-war events in Viet-Nam, which culminated in the Armistice Agreement at the Geneva Conference in 1954. Let us hope that the present phase will yield place in course of time to the formation of unified Viet-Nam by peaceful means and on the basis of democratic principles.

India is an ancient country whose past goes beyond the dawn of history stretching into the period known as the pre-historic era. Many centuries ago we had close ties, cultural, social and religious, with many countries in South-East Asia, including Viet-Nam. It gives us great pleasure to recollect those times when our two countries were bound by close ties of friendship; more so because we are looking forward to projecting the friendly relations of the past into the future so that our common ties and the desire for economic reconstruction at home and the consolidation of peace in the world forge new links for us making the friendly ties already subsisting between our peoples still stronger. Like Viet-Nam, India is also a predominantly agricultural country. Since the transfer of power into our hands we have been busy with planning in order to develop our material resources. We are in the midst of a varied programme of development which includes the establishment of heavy industries, implementation of big and small hydroelectric projects, improving our agriculture and putting the village industries and arts and crafts on a modern and a better footing. I hope during your stay in this country Your Excellency will be able to see at least a few of these projects. Once again I extend a hearty welcome to Your Excellency on behalf of the people and the Government of India and hope that Your Excellency’s sojourn in this country will be enjoyable and that it will bring still closer in fruitful collaboration the peoples of India and the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam.¹²⁴

President Ho Chi Minh in his speech said:

I wish to sincerely thank H.E. the President for his kind and friendly greetings. This is an honour not only for me personally, but also for the whole

people of Vietnam. We are very happy and deeply moved to come to great India, the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Indian culture, philosophy and art have had a glorious development and made great contributions to mankind. The basis and tradition of Indian philosophy is the ideal of peace and fraternity. For many centuries, Buddhist thought and Indian art and science have been expanding all over the world. But, colonialism imposed its rule over India for hundreds of years and hindered the Indian people's development. To recover their independence and freedom, the Indian people had been heroically and perseveringly struggling against colonialism. Now, India is a great power with an increasingly important role on the world stage. The Indian government and people have greatly contributed to the preservation of world peace, to the development of friendly relations and cooperation among nations, on the basis of the five principles of peaceful co-existence. Faithful to the Bandung spirit, the Indian government has made important contributions to the building of the great unity between Asian and African countries. In the economic field, the Indian Government and people have fulfilled the first Five-Year Plan and are striving to carry out the second Five-Year Plan. In the cultural field, your scientists, and intellectuals have promoted the glorious traditions of Mahatma Gandhi and of the great poet Tagore and are contributing all their strength to the building of the country. We sincerely wish the brotherly Indian people greater and greater successes and wish increasing prosperity to India. At present, the forces of aggression in the world are plotting to push mankind into a most disastrous war, but the peoples the world over loathe and are fed up with war. The people have uneasily struggled to preserve and consolidate peace. In this struggle for peace India has made valuable contributions. The forces of peace are now stronger than ever and are capable of preventing war. But the warmongers have not given up their plans of aggression. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam warmly welcomes all initiatives, all efforts aimed at lessening international tension. We fully agree with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in supporting

the Soviet proposals for a conference of leaders of various countries, with a view strengthening international cooperation and mutual confidence to preserve world peace. We are also opposed to all military aggressive blocs. We stand for general disarmament, for the prohibition of the tests and use of atomic and hydrogen weapons. The policy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is to make all possible contributions to the cause of world peace. At present, in Vietnam, on account of colonialist interference, national reunification by free general elections as provided for in the Geneva Agreements has not yet been realized. That is hurting the feelings of the Vietnamese people and is an infringement on our national sovereignty. For thousands of years, Vietnam has been one, the Vietnamese people have been one, no force can divide it. We are determined to struggle for the reunification of our country by peaceful means and on the basis of independence and democracy. Having a just cause and with the unity of the whole people and the sympathy and support of the world, we are confident that Vietnam will be reunified. On behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and of the Vietnamese people, I wish to thank the International Commission with India as its chairman for the efforts in the supervision and control of the implementation of the Geneva Agreements in Vietnam. In its struggle for the consolidation of peace and for national reunification, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the people of Vietnam are always grateful for the sympathy and support of the Government and people of brotherly India. The Vietnamese people will always remember that Mahatma Gandhi lent the support to their resistance in its early stage, and that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru has many times raised his voice in protest against the war of aggression in Vietnam. The visits of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and of Vice President S. Radhakrishnan to Vietnam have further promoted friendship between our two countries. We are convinced that our present visit to India will further strengthen these friendly relations and at the same time contribute to the consolidations and promotion of solidarity among Asian and African

countries. In conclusion, may I propose a toast to the health of H.E. President Rajendra Prasad and H.E. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to the health of all the ladies and gentlemen present, to the prosperity of the Great Republic of India, to the unshakable friendship of the Indian people and the Vietnamese people, to the continual strengthening of solidarity among Asian and African countries, to the consolidation of peace in Asia and in the world, and Panchsheel.¹²⁵

Nehru-Ho Chi Minh Joint Statement issued a joint statement at the conclusion of the visit:

At the invitation of the Government of India, His Excellency Dr HoChi-Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, visited India from 5 to 13 February 1958. During his stay, the President visited places of historical and cultural interest, hydro-electric projects, industrial centres and community development projects. The President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam met the President of India, the Prime Minister of India and other members of the Government of India, and took the opportunity of his visit to have a friendly and informal exchange of views with the Prime Minister on the international situation, and matters of mutual interest to their two countries. The President expressed his deep appreciation of the warm welcome given to him and of the friendship of the Indian people for the people of Vietnam. The President was glad to have the opportunity to see, himself, the Indian people's love for peace and their Government's achievements in the building of a modern country while at the same time retaining and developing their ancient and traditional culture. The President and the Prime Minister reaffirmed their faith in Panchsheel, the five principles of peaceful co-existence. They affirmed their belief that the application of these principles in international relations will help to relax international tensions and provide a basis for peace and understanding among nations. The President and the Prime Minister agreed that, with the developments in the fields of space travel and atomic and thermonuclear warfare, maintenance of peace has, more than ever before, become imperative. They agreed that a high level meeting for the consideration of ways

and means to end nuclear and thermo-nuclear tests and for achieving progressive disarmament and the lessening of world tensions is eminently desirable and expressed the hope that it will take place early. The President and the Prime Minister were of the opinion that military blocs only result in increasing international tensions and expressed their resolve to continue and intensify, in their respective spheres, their efforts towards the maintenance of peace.¹²⁶

Even while facing international reprimand, India stood close to its belief to support Vietnam in its testing times during the 60s and 70s, which was well appreciated by Vietnam.¹²⁷

4. Leon Prouchandy/ Purushanthi – The French Indian Nationalist

The Proucandy/ Puruanthi family belonged to Pondicherry and had migrated to French Indochina. Belonging to this family was Darmanathan Prouchandy who was the first steam navigator from south India, who plied steamers in the Mekong delta since 1891. Savarikkannu Purushanthi, made his fortunes in Vietnam and later returned to Pondicherry as one of the wealthiest men. He was a money changer, real estate owner and horse breeder. He was conferred the award of Chevalier du Mérite Agricole by the French Government in the year 1914. Leon Purushanthi/Prouchandy, his brother's son, was a French graduate who played an important role in the Indian community of Vietnam and was politically active. He was born in Pondicherry on 1st May 1901 in a middle-class Tamil Christian family. Like many Pondicherrians, studied in a French school in Saigon and was a *Brevet* diploma holder.¹²⁸ He took over the landed properties of Saverikannu Prouchandy in Saigon and Pondicherry and is also known for his donations to the needy and to public causes.¹²⁹

Even though Leon Purushathi was a French Indian, unlike others he took a keen interest in India's freedom struggle and provided immense support and aid to Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and his Indian National army. He closely observed and followed the Indian National Movement and influenced by Gandhian ideology he gave up his government job. He wrote articles in French newspapers and magazines

of Ind0 China and noticed the discrimination towards Indians because of their dress, which motivated him to initiate the ‘Dress Reforms’ in the 1930’s.¹³⁰ Leon Purushanthi opposed the caste system and even though a Christian, he had contacts with Tamil Muslims of Saigon and visited Hindu temples as well. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, he was influenced by Gandhi’s call to Indians asking them to relinquish their jobs as a sign of protest, and gave up his job in French credit bank, the news of which appeared in a Franco-Indian journal of Pondicherry called *L’Inde Illustré*.¹³¹ In September 1939 when the Second World War broke out a pro-German French regime was installed in Vichy under Maréchal Pétain in June 1940.

Prouchandy used to proclaim that ‘we (Pondicherry Tamils) are French only in paper, but in our hearts, we are Indians. We will take only what is good in European civilisation, but leave the bad.’ He contributed immensely to the Netaji War Fund in terms of gold, jewellery and cash, and even though threatened by pro French supports, he did not deter from contributing to and supporting the Indian struggle against colonial regime.¹³²

On 9th August 1943 Subhas Chandra Bose flew to Saigon where he was greeted with open arms by many members of the Indian/Tamil community of Saigon. While he was driving down in an open car along one of the main streets of Saigon, Léon Prouchandy of Pondicherry ascended the car and garlanded Bose with a gold necklace which was a gold *kasumaalai* that had belonged to his wife. Bose even addressed a rally of some 1000 Indian (mostly Tamil) residents of Saigon. Leon Prouchandy eventually became one of the principal financiers and supporters of the Indian freedom struggle in Saigon.¹³³ Leon Prouchandy greeted him by presenting.

On 21st July 1945, the ‘Provisional Government Day’ was celebrated by the Indian Tamils of Saigon and the Indian national flag and the Japanese flag were hoisted in front of houses and shops during that day. The celebrations included offering special prayers at the Saigon mosque, situated at Amiral Dupré Street which was attended by, A.C.Chatterji and A.M.Sahai, and members of

all Indian communities. Speeches given by the north Indian leaders were translated into Tamil by Moulvi Khaliloor Rahman, a Tamil Muslim from Koothanallur.

The General Secretariat of the Indian Independence League (I.I.L.) of Saigon, was established in the palatial residence of Prouchandy located on 76 Rue Paul Blanchy at Saigon and was given to IIL rent free.¹³⁴ “A soldier of the Indian National Army stood guard at the entrance. As the provisional government of Free India had accepted romanised Hindustani as the common language for all Indians, Hindustani classes were conducted in Saigon for the Tamils. Inscription for these classes were to be done at the Office of the I.I.L. at 76, rue Paul Blanchy. Besides, a recruitment bureau for the Indian National Army was established in the same place. Its secretary was a Tamil Muslim known as Abdul Majid Sahib. All details regarding recruitment and training were to be obtained from the Secretariat of the I.I.L. During this period a certain Nuarudin seems to have been the President of I.I.L. in Saigon.”³²

After the defeat of Japanese forces, “one afternoon probably towards the end of September 1945, a colonial military jeep approached the villa of Leon Prouchandy at 76, rue Paul Blanchy in Saigon, which until then served as the Secretariat of the Indian Independence League. Some soldiers brought down the three flags –Indian, Vietnamese and Japanese - that still flew atop the residence. They arrested Léon Prouchandy from his villa and took him away to an unknown destination.”¹³⁵ He returned home after about three months but was now suffering from amnesia. The top French doctor of Saigon, Dr. Le Vilain tried to cure Léon Prouchandy but was to no avail.

Léon Prouchandy was not the once rich and wealthy man anymore but his philanthropic nature remained with him. “Whatever money that was given to him he distributed it amongst the poor and the children, seated at the government park in front of Villa Aroumé, the present Dining Hall of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Sometimes he used to even sit with ordinary labourers on the roadside and eat their food.”¹³⁶

5. Chettiar – Builders of Temples and Educational Institutes

The Chettiars found a strong foothold in Vietnam and settled primarily in Saigon. There were 110 chettiar money lending firms in Cochin China by 1930. They mostly lent money to agriculturists and the Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report mentions that they gave loans on big scale as well as on short terms on the security of the crop harvest.¹³⁷ The rates of interest were high ranging from 15% to 25% per month, in the period of economic boon when peasants borrowed to increase cultivation.¹³⁸

“In the late 1920s, individual Chettiars’ annual incomes from property averaged from 60,000 to 100,000 piastres. Further rental income (3,000 piastres monthly) came from rental properties belonging to the temple fund, in collective Chettiar possession. It was not until the onset of the Depression that Nattukottai Chettiars came into possession, through debt foreclosure, of vast tracts of agricultural land. Their gains in this time amounted to 30,000 hectares of land, worth 3,300,000 piastres. Seventy-three percent of the area they possessed was Transbassac paddy land.”¹³⁹ The community hit upon hard times during the Depression years and the number of firms was halved and came down to 55 and the total credit came down to 20 million piaster in 1937. The inability of peasants and farmers to pay back dues made Chettiars landowners “The peasant of Annam range and Cochin China failed to repay their loans, thus making the chettiars seize their lands for the bad debts. During 1930s Chettiars were holding around 25% of the land in Cochin China.”¹⁴⁰

Despite hardships they continued to have a prominent presence in the economic arena. They possessed 1/3rd of total rice credit in Cochin China, and it is said that during 1940s half of Indo-China was indebted to Chettiars. Chettiars continued to hold their position as reliable money lenders amongst landowners in Cochin China and Annam.¹⁴¹ The richest Chettiar in 1932 was A R M Soocalingam chitty of Saigon who accumulated a fortune of 2-3 million piasters equivalent to 20-30 million francs. In 1937 there were 120 Chettiar establishments in Cochin China owning an estimated 22,204 hectares

of land in the Mekong Delta and it is estimated that they repatriated about 65% of their earnings in 1939.¹⁴²

The money and wealth the Chettiars accumulated was invested initially in the construction and maintenance of temples. “Magamai is a definite percentage of commercial profits earned by the Chettiars to be set aside for charity. Out of this, certain types are set aside only for the temples. It is a unique attribute of this community, that wherever they go to conduct business, from Saigon to Cochin China, they have built a temple out of their business earnings. The ‘magamai’ contributions helped the upkeep of these temples. They had the practice of collecting ‘magamai’ wherever they set foot for business. That’s how they were able to build temples in all the places of their business.”¹⁴³ The jewels and other assets in the Saigon temple were estimated at 50 million in 1971. This invariably announced the Chettiar wealth accumulation to the Vietnamese.¹⁴⁴

During the 20th century they utilised their wealth to provide for educational institutions, especially for girls, research institutes, health care places, rural development centers and digging up of tanks in the water scarce Chettinad and they are credited with the establishment of schools and colleges in their home town.¹⁴⁵ “During their stint in Vietnam, the Chettiars gave generous donations to renovate the mausoleum of General Lê Văn Duyệt in the late 1930s. Lê Văn Duyệt (1764–1832) served as Emperor Gia Long’s viceroy in the south, before the region came under centralized control.”¹⁴⁶

6. Messengers of Peace and Compassion

In addition to political and economic ties, India and Vietnam share religious linkages, particularly in Buddhism since the ancient times. “In the late half of the 2nd century BC, two Indian Buddhist Zen monks Mahajavaka and Kalyanacuri came to Vietnam and the latter became the head bonze of Dau Pagoda (in Bac Ninh Province) and founded Buddhism in Vietnam. K’ang-seng-huei, of Sogdiane origin I beginning of 3rd century CE migrated to India and then to Giao Chau (Vietnam) with his family. He learned religious teachings and later on became a

famous Zen monk, translated the *Astasahasika* on the topic of Sunyata and Nagarjuna and developed the famous theory of Madhyamaka. Virutaruci, an Indian Zen monk, came to Giao Chau (Vietnam) in the 6th century CE where he established the first Zen branch in Vietnam and expanded the principles of eight negations of the Nagarjuna. “In the beginning of the 11th century, the Zen monk Sung Pham, the 11th generation of the Virutaruci branch, came to India to study Buddhism for 9 years, and then returned home to bring strong development of Tantrism which has existed since the 10th century. Many other Tantrist monks from India such as Yogibrahman (the 13th century), Bodhist (the 14th century) came to Vietnam, and were well received by the Tran dynasty.”¹⁴⁷ Travels of Buddhist missionaries to India continues well into the 20th century with the purpose of spreading peace and message of love and humanity. The other missionaries who worked selflessly towards helping the poor, homeless, elderly and children are nuns belonging to the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa.

Thích Nhất Hạnh

Born on 26 October Thích Nhất Hạnh is a Vietnamese Zen monk who is the leading figure behind ‘Engaged Buddhism’. He was born in the city of Quảng Ngãi in Central Vietnam (Thừa Thiên) in 1926 and entered the monastery at Từ Hiếu Temple near Huế, Vietnam at the age of 16. He graduated from Bao Quoc Buddhist Academy in Central Vietnam, Thích Nhất Hạnh and received training in Zen and the Mahayana school of Buddhism and was ordained as a monk in 1949. In 1956, he was named editor-in-chief of Vietnamese Buddhism, the periodical of the Unified Vietnam Buddhist Association. Over the years he has authored over a 100 books including 40 in English. “He founded Lá Bối Press, the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon, and the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS), a neutral corps of Buddhist peace workers who went into rural areas to establish schools, build healthcare clinics, and help re-build villages. Nhat Hanh is now recognized as a Dharmacharya and as the spiritual head of the Từ Hiếu Temple and associated monasteries. On May 1, 1966 at Từ Hiếu Temple, Thích Nhất Hạnh

he received the “lamp transmission” from Master Chân Thật making him a Dharmacharya or Dharma Teacher.”¹⁴⁸ He travelled to Princeton University, USA, in 1960 to study comparative religion and was then given the post of lecturer at the Columbia University. By now he had gained mastery over many languages- Chinese, French, Pali, Sanskrit, English and Japanese. In 1963, he returned to Vietnam to aid his fellow monks in their non-violent peace efforts.¹⁴⁹ In 1969, Nhat Hanh was the delegate for the Buddhist Peace Delegation at the Paris Peace talks and in 1973 Thích Nhất Hạnh was denied permission to return to Vietnam and he went into exile in France.¹⁵⁰ It was in 2005 that Nhat Hanh was given permission from the Vietnamese government to return for a visit and was also allowed to teach there, publish four of his books in Vietnamese, and travel the country with monastic and lay members of his Order, including a return to his root temple, Tu Hieu Temple in Huế.¹⁵¹

Nhat Hanh has also been the leader of the Engaged Buddhism movement which promotes the individual’s active role in creating change. In his book *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* he uses the term ‘Engaged Buddhism’ for the first time. Throughout his life he has actively promoted the message of peace and nonviolent methods in resolving conflicts, in connection with which he has traversed widely across the world.¹⁵² He cites the 13th-century Vietnamese King Trần Nhân Tông with the origination of the concept who abdicated his throne to become a monk, and founded the Vietnamese Buddhist School in the Bamboo Forest tradition.¹⁵³ The monk has a substantial following across the world, and “In the West, like the East, Engaged Buddhism is a way of attempting to link authentic Buddhist meditation with social action. The current Dalai Lama has voiced a need for Buddhists to be more involved in the social and political realm.”¹⁵⁴ His “Fourteen Precepts of the Order of Interbeing” are built around concepts of nonviolence and interdependence in the world and that all Buddhist morality is based upon “right view” which is namely, the quest for enlightenment¹⁵⁵

“Engaged Buddhism” arose as a Buddhist response to the widespread trauma—including colonialism, war, social and economic injustice,

environmental degradation, genocide, totalitarian government, and the suppression of religion—that has accompanied the advent of modernity in some Asian Buddhist countries.¹⁵⁶... Engaged Buddhism resonates with many Western Buddhists, who appreciate the confluence of their religious practice with Western political and social theory and European Enlightenment values, such as human rights, distributive justice, social progress, and freedom from oppression. In Asia and in the West, engaged Buddhism has taken a multiplicity of forms, including working for: peace and nonviolence, human rights, just and equitable development, liberation from oppressive government, social and economic justice, prison reform, access to education and health care, environmental protection and sustainability, and gender and racial equality.”¹⁵⁷

“Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention to apply the values and teachings of Buddhism to the problems of society in a nonviolent way, motivated by concern for the welfare of others, and as an expression of one’s own practice of the Buddhist Way”¹⁵⁸

“Nhat Hanh’s Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism succinctly formulates his approach to engaged Buddhism. These include: Openness: Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance; Nonattachment to Views: Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions; Freedom of Thought: Aware of the suffering brought about when we impose our views on others; Awareness of Suffering: Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering; Simple, Healthy Living: Aware that true happiness is rooted in peace, solidity, freedom, and compassion, and not in wealth or fame; Dealing with Anger: Aware that anger blocks communication and creates suffering; Dwelling Happily in the Present Moment: Aware that life is available only in the present moment and that it is possible to live happily in the here and now; Community and Communication: Aware that the lack of communication always brings separation and suffering; Protecting the Sangha: Aware that the essence and aim of a Sangha is the

practice of understanding and compassion; Right Livelihood: Aware that great violence and injustice have been done to our environment and society; Reverence for Life: Aware that much suffering is caused by war and conflict; Generosity: Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression; Right Conduct (For lay members): Aware that sexual relations motivated by craving cannot dissipate the feeling of loneliness but will create more suffering, frustration, and isolation—(For monastic members): Aware that the aspiration of a monk or a nun can only be realized when he or she wholly leaves behind the bonds of worldly love”¹⁵⁹

Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized, “Buddhism means awake – mindful of what is happening in one’s body, feelings, mind in the world. If you are awake you cannot do otherwise than act compassionately to help relieve suffering you see around you. So Buddhism must engage in the world. If it is not engaged it is not Buddhism.”¹⁶⁰

Thich Nhat Hanh visited India on three occasions, of which the visits in 1997 and 2008 have been recorded. During his visit in 1997 he had a wonderful meeting with Mr. K.R. Narayanan (then Vice President of India) on politics and spirituality, after which the Ethics Committee was set up in Parliament,¹⁶¹ he spoke at the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi, on “Worlds in Harmony”, and held a five day retreat at the Theosophical Society, Chennai, among other programmes.¹⁶²

In 1997 Thich Nhat Hanh, along with 12 monks and nuns from Plum Village and friends spent three weeks in February and March traveling through India and visiting many important sites of the Buddha’s life. On his first evening in Delhi, 18 February, the Hindi translations of *Old Path White Clouds Our*, *Appointment with Life*, *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, and *The Stone Boy* was released by Mr. Ashok Desai Attorney General of India at a press conference. Which was reported in about 20 newspapers and some television channels.

On 20 February he visited the Jain Bird Hospital in Old Delhi, where he was warmly welcomed by the managers and doctors. At the hospital he

gave medicine to a bird and thereafter he along with accompanying monks and nuns released the healed birds. On the afternoon of the same day he held a meeting with the Vice President of India, Mr. K.R. Narayanan and even though the meeting was scheduled to last for 20 minutes, it carried on for an hour.¹⁶³ They discussed how the chairman and members of Parliament could apply the practice of mindfulness, deep listening and loving speech in the congress. He suggested, “Mr. Narayanan, may it would be good to begin every session with the practice of mindful breathing. Then, a few lines could be read to bring awareness into everyone’s mind such as : Dear colleagues, the people who have elected us expect that we will communicate with each other using kind and respectful speech and deep listening in order to share our insight so that the parliament can make the best decisions for the benefit of the nation and the people. It would take less than one minute to read such a text and afterward something like a bell of mindfulness could be used.”¹⁶⁴

“Every time the debate became too hot and people were insulting and condemning each other, the chairperson could sound the bell of mindfulness saying-We are not calm enough, let us stop arguing and be silent for one or two minutes. Then he could invite everyone to breathe in and out- breathing in calming, breathing out smiling- until the atmosphere became calm. Then the one who was speaking would be invited to continue his or her speech.”¹⁶⁵

Accordingly, the Ethics Committee of Rajya Sabha consisting of nine members was constituted by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha on 4 March 1997, to oversee the moral and ethical conduct of the members and to examine the cases referred to it with reference to the ethical and other misconduct by members. It was, in fact, the first such Committee to be set up by any legislature in India. Subsequently, the strength of the Committee was raised to ten members. Members of the Committee including its Chairman are nominated by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha and they are generally leaders/deputy leaders/whips of their parties in the Rajya Sabha.¹⁶⁶ Hanh also met with other respected leaders including Ms. Kapila Vatsayyan, the Director of the Indira Gandhi

National Centre for the Arts and the President of the India International Centre. The Committee was inaugurated by the then Vice-President of India and the Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Shri K.R. Narayanan, on 30 May 1997.¹⁶⁷

The next morning a visit was undertaken to the Vasant Valley School, where he spent time talking to children and teaching them songs and basic meditation. Later in evening Hanh gave a talk on “Worlds in Harmony” to a full house at the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. A practice session was organised on the following Saturday morning at the Tibet House at the Buddha Jayanti Park and in the afternoon at India International Centre he was introduced to an attentive crowd of 1200 people by Professor Ramachandra Chandra Gandhi and here Hanh spoke about “Walking Lightly,” the four mantras, and the relationship between father and son.

On 23 February he spoke about relationships to about three hundred people who came to attend a Day of Mindfulness on Sunday hosted at a beautiful park and home of a local Jain patron at the Sanskriti Kendra. Sister Chan Khong led a deep relaxation and “Touching the Earth,” session and a kino meditation (a kino is a cross between a tangerine and an orange).¹⁶⁸

The next morning he travelled to Bodh Gaya where he was welcomed by people and banners across the road reading “Thich Nhat Hanh and friends.” There he sat under the Bodhi tree, offered copies of Old Path Wide clouds in Hindi and English versions and chanted and then sat in silence amidst the chanting of sutras by pilgrims from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Japan, and other countries in their own languages. He walked around the temple complex and then went across the Neranjara River to the village of Sujata and Svasti where he presented translations of Old Path White Clouds to the village headman for the library and school. At the Mahabodhi Society Hall he gave a talk, “The Earth as Witness,” in the afternoon, and the next morning he left for Rajgir. Here he spent time meditating on the Vulture Peak, which was Buddha’s favourite meditation spot, gave a Dhamma talk and towards sunset walked down

the 2500 year old path built by King Bimbisara. He had breakfast on the succeeding day at the Bamboo Grove and “The children who were begging here soon became friends with Thay’s gentle handling. He held their hands and slowly they relaxed. Later he and the others played games with the children by the Karanda Lake. The children, who had been begging and grabbing only a short while before, passed food to each other with great dignity. After lunch we drove through mustard fields and mango trees to the remains of the famous monastic university at Nalanda, where the Mahayana school developed.”¹⁶⁹ His next stop was Calcutta where he gave a talk at a Hindu temple and on 3rd March he boarded the plane for Chennai where he spent 5 days. Hanh held talks every morning and Dhamma discussions in the afternoons, tea meditation and Touching the Earth. On his last day the 40 people who took the Five Mindfulness Trainings decided to continue the practise in Chennai. He managed to pack into his schedule on the last day at Chennai two talks and a press conference where some audiotapes and two more books, including *Being Peace* were released. “On the last evening in Delhi, our traveling Sangha had a closing circle and many recited insight poems. They won the hearts of many people in India and offered his help in practical ways. We continue to hear stories of how people are putting into practice what they heard, and over 40 came to our first Sangha meeting in Delhi on March 16. At the first press conference, Thay had introduced himself as a son of India and said that his spiritual ancestor was the Buddha. We felt that Thay was very happy to be in India, and we would be happy to welcome him any time to come back and make his home here as his ancestors did.”¹⁷⁰

His next visit to India was in 2008 in which he interacted with people, children and politicians. He gave a number of talks and attended numerous meetings throughout his stay in India. He was invited to be the National Guest Editor for all Times of India publications on 2nd of October, Gandhi Jayanti also observed as UN World Non Violence day for which a meeting with senior editors of Times of India was organised at Gandhi Darshan guest house, Rajghat subsequent to which

he visited the newspaper office to interact with the top management including Samir Jain, Vice Chairman of the group. Thich Nhat Hanh delivered the Gandhi Memorial Lecture to mark the 60th year of Gandhiji’s martyrdom and World Non- Violence Day 2008 celebrations followed by the launch of the book ‘Power’ published by Harper Collins and released by H. E. Anand Sharma, MOS Ministry of External Affairs. The session was attended by a large audience including many dignitaries like Dr. Karan Singh, head ICCR; Mrs. Tara Bhattacharya grand-daughter of Gandhiji, Ms. Savita Singh, Director, Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti and H. E. Vu Quang Diem, Ambassador Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

On Gandhi Jayanti 2nd October 2008 an Interfaith Peace Walk titled ‘Peace is every step’ on Rajpath commemorating the International Day of Non-violence, was organised in which more than 1000 people led by Thich Nhat Hanh walked for peace, slowly with mindfulness, in silence down historic Rajpath. The event was flagged off by the Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit. At IIC Delhi an entire day was devoted to mindfulness which was attended by about 300 people including many members of the IIC and the Former Attorney General of India, Mr. Ashok Desai introduced Thich Nhat Hanh to the audience. The event included a talk followed in the Fountain Lawns by the walking meditation in Lodhi Gardens.

On 5th October 2008 he had a private meeting with Mrs. Sonia Gandhi at her residence 10, Janpath, New Delhi which lasted for one hour meeting and there was a sharing of communal concerns. Thich Nhat Hanh offered full support from the Plum village community in any way sought by Mrs. Gandhi who also felt that Ahimsa Trust’s focus on mindfulness in education as a seed programme for sustainable community benefit.

The next day, 6th October 2008 he gave a talk titled ‘Meditation and healing’ to the medical community at the AIIMS auditorium. The organisers of the event included prestigious hospital and institutes such as World Academy of Spiritual Sciences, Gangaram hospital, Max India and All India Institute of Medical Sciences The event was attended by 400 members

including eminent doctors including and AIIMS Dean in chair and Dr.S. K. Sama.

Thereafter he travelled to Nagpur where he gave a talk for 45 minutes to about 200000 people who had gathered at Dikshabhumi to commemorate the day Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism in 1956. Governor Gawai from Kerala, Bhiku Sasai and other eminent Buddhists of India and abroad attended. The rest of the sangha visited Dikshabhumi the next day and introduced various practices to many thousands of people. On 9th October 2008 he gave a talk to Buddhists and other in an event organised by Trilokya Baudh Maha Sangha Sahaiyika Gana (TBMSG), Nagarjuna Institute, Malini Srinivasan, at Nagaloka, Nagpur. The same organisers held a two day retreat for about 300 Dalit social activist and workers, Buddhists and the general public. On 10th and 11th October at Nagaloka in Nagpur a children's programme was organised led by the monks and nuns accompanying Thich Nhat Hanh.

His next Public Talk was "Understanding our Mind" held on 13th October 2008, Sports and Cultural Club, Sector 15A, Noida which was attended by about 800 people. The session started with some meditation, songs and chanting, thereafter he was welcomed by the representative of the Club and the RWA and introduced by Dharmacharya Shantum Seth. Thich Nhat Hanh gave a one hour talk focussing on Buddhist psychology.

At Delhi a talk on "Leading with Courage and Compassion" in Parliament was held on 17th October 2008 in the Parliament annex where he addressed the parliamentarians. The event was hosted in parliament annexe and attended by many dignitaries like Dr. Karan Singh, Santosh Mohan Deb, Rahul Gandhi, Omar Abdullah, Priyanka and Robert Vadera, Navin and Shalu Jindal, other members of parliament and prominent citizens like Justice Liela Seth, OP Jain, William Bissel etc. The talk was on deep listening skills after which a request was made by attendees to start a regular training plan in parliament based on these teachings which is being followed up with the Speakers office.

He had a private meeting with Rahul Gandhi on 18th October 2008 at Gandhi Darshan guest house, Rajghat, Delhi where he had a personal one-on-one

discussion with Rahul Gandhi who showed interest in training for congress workers based on Thich Nhat Hanh's Mindfulness teachings.

In partnership with 'Living Together in Harmony' a 5 day long (3 evenings and a weekend) retreat at the Teen Murti House was organised by Ministry of Culture, Government of NCT of Delhi, Spice Foundation, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti which was attended by 750 people, amongst which were prominent personalities such as Director of the NMML, Ms. Mridula Mukherjee, Navin Jindal, Priyanka and Robert Vadra, academics, teachers and people from all walks of life. The three evenings focussed on talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, walking meditation, eating meditation and the introduction of practices such as Deep Relaxation and the 5 Mindfulness Trainings. On the weekend, besides the above, discussion groups were formed, Beginning Anew, Touching the Earth and tea meditation was introduced. The monastics had a two day session of interaction with children organised on the weekend where different NGOs were invited along with the participants children .

In the international conclave 'Path of Awakening' held from 20th to 29th October 2008, 300 international participants travelled with Thich Nhat Hanh to Sarnath, Bodhgaya, Nalanda and Rajgir over 10 days where he gave a number of public lectures and visited the Buddhist sites. The participants included people from different countries in Europe, the US, Asia and Australia and included professionals, journalist, doctors etc.¹⁷¹

Thich Nu Tri Thuan Nun

Thich Nu Tri Thuan is Vietnamese Buddhist nun, who is the abbess of Linh-Son Chinese Buddhist temple in Kushinagar, northern India. Born in Dong Ha Quang Tri Vietnam in 1945, she was adopted by an American family, yet even though she lived in comfort in Michigan she always remembered the sufferings of the poor. In 1985 she left home and went to study Buddhism in France and was ordained as a nun in 1989 and she vowed to dedicate her life to helping others. ¹⁷²"On television, I saw people living in poverty in India and Africa. I thought that if I became a nun, I could help these people," ¹⁷³

She is the founder of the educational and vocational school sponsored by Vietnamese Buddhists with an idea “knowledge will change the lives of children”.¹⁷⁴ Although initially she had planned to start her humanitarian work in Africa, due to the language barrier her master, the late Most Venerable Thich Huyen VI, advised her to go to India, which later became her base.¹⁷⁵ She decided to go to India in 1989 and faced hardships during the construction of a ruined temple in Kushinagar where there was no electricity and no fund to sustain her daily needs. Her grit and determination gave a new lease of life to the Lin Son Vietnamese Chinese temple at Kushinagar.¹⁷⁶ The temple which was built in 1945 has got a new lease of life through her constant efforts and endeavours. She repaired the severely damaged shrine hall which can now accommodate about 150 people. It houses a Museum with over 2000 Buddha statues, a prayer hall with capacity of 100 people, two fully furnished buildings that can accommodate 150 people, a dining hall that has a seating capacity of 150 people.¹⁷⁷

She has worked tirelessly for 23 years in Kushinagar which has earned her the respect of the people who call her ‘Mataji’ lovingly. She has taken over 5000 poor kids of the streets and built 24 schools. Every year just prior to the onset of winters she carries out the ‘Winter Blankets Donation’ project. She also runs a free clinic for students and the poor. She distribute food to over 7000 less fortunate people every year. She also organizes teams of monks and nuns who travel to remote areas to propagate Buddhism and since 2005 the temple organizes a prayer ceremony annually at the beginning of March in which a prayer ceremony for World Peace is held over 7 days and 7 Nights.¹⁷⁸

In Kushinagar - where the Buddha passed away, nun Thich Nu Tri Thuan also became famous after 23 years dedicating herself to this land and charity school there. She carries out her humanitarian work with help of funds and donations given by devotees and tourists visiting the temple and contribution by Vietnamese Buddhists around the world. The money donated is spent on building of schools, hiring teachers and taking care of students. Many students

have graduated from Vietnam Linh Son school, some of them have become nurses, doctors and move to New Delhi – capital of India to work.¹⁷⁹

A school has also been built in Bodhgaya which in its year of establishment in 2003 had only 45 students which has increased to nearly 700. The school has four branches and teaches children from class 5 to 10. A fifth branch began operating on opposite side of the Niranjana river as according to Nun Nu Tri Thuan, “The children there are very poor so they need to go to school, even though they have to cross the river with some difficulties. I look forward to building a bridge across the river for children going to school easily”.¹⁸⁰ She has dedicated 12 years of volunteer work in Bodhgaya and for her the three most difficult stages faced in building the school were: digging wells and building school; persuading teachers and students to come to school; the departure of the devoted Buddhists. “I came here with \$ 400 and saw many poor street children. The first job was to hire people to dig 22 wells to help people get clean water“, the founder of the school said. The memory of a poor pupil with scabies in ear walking with his mother to school still remained with her and made the nun determine to “change the fate of children.”¹⁸¹

Mother Teresa

The bond between Mother Teresa and Vietnam was established in July 1973, when the then Archbishop of Saigon, Mgr. Paul Nguyen Van Binh, asked her to send nuns to serve the poor in Saigon. In June 1973, Mother Teresa sent seven priests to serve in Saigon, including Father Andrea, who collaborated with Mother Teresa to form the Missionaries of Charity and Archbishop Nguyen Van Binh bought two houses at Cong Quynh Street, District I, for the care of the poor and the poor.¹⁸²

Mother Teresa travelled to Vietnam five times between 1993 and 1995. Her first visit was in September 1991, when she came to Hanoi but was not allowed to proceed to Saigon by the Vietnamese authorities. The second time, on November 4, 1993, she came from Hong Kong to Saigon along with Sister Nirmala and Dr. Jannet accompanying her to help her. She came to Saigon without any notice in a

quiet way and was greeted by the Consulate of India and Vietnamese secretary at the airport.- On the way from the airport to the hotel, Mother Teresa wrote the name and address of Sister Ha Thi Thanh Tinh and gave it to the consulate, who gave the note to the secretary with the address Ha Thi Thanh Tinh, 428 Huynh Van Banh, F.14, Phu Nhuan District written on it. When So Thanh Thanh received the message she was attending the evening Mass and preparing to help give Mass to the parishioners at the New Republic Church.

During the third visit, in 1994, Mother Teresa worked together with the eight nuns who ran the orphanage at 38 Tu Xuong Street in Ho Chi Minh City, which welcomes thousands of abandoned children from different provinces of the country.¹⁸³ She led the newly formed communities which included the 8 Soeurs to Vietnam to serve the poor, four Soeurs to work at the Center for Children with Disabilities in Thuy An Commune, Ba Vi District, Hung Hoa Province, four Soeurs to serve at 38 Tu Xuong, District 3, Saigon, take care of orphans. Every Thursday, the Soeurs in 38 Tu Xuong would come to the Eucharistic Adoration with their Vietnamese sisters at 428 Huynh Van Banh.¹⁸⁴

During her fourth visit, she came, along with Sister Nirmala and Dr. Jannet accompanying her to help her in April 1995, Mother Teresa came to Vietnam to visit her sisters, and sent a petition asking the authorities to allow her to open houses for religious vocations. Mother sent a list of 20 sisters at home 428 Huynh Van Banh and asked to open a house here. She also applied to sponsor 7 Vietnamese sisters to India for training. But the government does not approve. During Mother Teresa's visit to Vietnam, she visited the sisters at 428 Huynh Van Banh many times.

The fifth time and the last time Mother Teresa travelled from Singapore to Vietnam. She applied for a visa extension for the nuns, but the government has refused. In December 1995, the Communist Party told her that all the sisters of the congregation had to leave by 23 December.¹⁸⁵

The Missionaries of Christ's Charity started with only 20 sisters but its numbers to 68 professed sisters, 20 novices and 43 Postulates and from its beginnings at a little home located on 428 Huynh Van Banh, Phu Nhuan District, Ho Chi Minh City, it has extended out to 7 other dioceses in Vietnam with numerous Missionaries posts:

Saigon Diocese: A Mother House; one orphanage for boys; one orphanage for girls; two Mother's Love homes for pregnant teenagers and young mothers; one school to erase illiteracy for poor children in Hoc Mon; and one Montessori to help poor families in Tan Qui.

Ba Ria Diocese: one mission in Long Dien Parish to teach catechism and bring communion to the sick and shut-in; and one mission in Hai Lam parish to assist the abandoned elderly, the destitute and the dying.

My Tho Diocese: one mission in Tram Chim to dispense medication for the sick and suffering.

Phu Cuong Diocese: one mission to assist the abandoned elderly, the destitute and the dying; and one Mother's Love home to help the pregnant teenagers.

Long Xuyen Diocese: two missions in Soc Son Hon Dat, one to erase illiteracy and one to dispense food and water to the poor.

Buon Ma Thuot Diocese: one mission at Dakmil to assist the runaway and poor children.

Phan Thiet Diocese : a mission at Vo Dat for medication and teaching catechism and bringing communion to the sick and shut-in.

Mercy Center: one mission consists of 12 registered nurse sisters who minister to the HIV/AIDS victims.¹⁸⁶

The Congregation now has 2 maternity homes -

Mother's first love was established in 1996 at Gx. Faith, Go Vap District, Saigon. After 16 years of work, the shelter has welcomed over 1300 girls to the shelter and saved more than 1300 foetus was born human. The second shelter was established at

the end of 2006 in Bung Parish, Thuan An District, Binh Duong Province and the shelter has received nearly 290 missing girls and saved 292 babies born. The First Love House at Gx. Tan Thong Commune, Cu Chi District over time through dedicated service of the pastor of Tan Thong and the sisters have raised more than 150 unmarried and elderly people. The Second Love House opened in 2011 at Gx. Phuoc Dien, Tay Ninh Province, which is currently caring for and nurturing 15 elderly homeless people.¹⁸⁷

The Sisters work day and day out tirelessly and selflessly helping the poor, ill, elderly and homeless. “After having fed their souls, the sisters ate a quick breakfast which was customary to the Vietnamese culture namely steamed rice. They went out in search of the poorest of the poor such as pregnant teenagers at abortion clinics and hospital, the orphans on streets corners, the HIV/AIDS in the slums or the abandoned elderly in the alleys. Upon encountering them, the sisters would take them home where they have a roof over their heads and warm food in their stomachs. After a long and laborious day of work, the sisters spent hours in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament to pray, praise and give thanks to God.”¹⁸⁸

Vietnam and India’s contacts in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century were well established and continuous. Even though Vietnam fought the French for independence and India against the British authorities, yet they stood united against imperialism and colonial rule and together strived to form an association of Asian countries that would help strengthen the regions vis a vis the western nations and create a region devoid of conflicts based on peace and non-interference. In the political arena from the 1950’ leaders from both Vietnam and India have had numerous state visits to each other’s countries where the leaders have been warmly welcomed and accorded high status. Besides political contact, both nations have also taken keen interest in economic developments and signed treaties. Contacts between these two nations were also furthered by visits of religious heads who not only limited themselves to teaching religious precepts, but rather extended their work towards humanitarian and social causes which have improved the lives of many common people.

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