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INDIA
AND
SOUTH EAST ASIA
1947-1960

*A STUDY OF INDIA'S POLICY
TOWARDS THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES
IN THE PERIOD 1947-1960*

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CHAPTER III

INDIA'S APPROACH TO ASIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

"I agree that European problems are and have been very important but I have felt that in the perspective of things to come, they [people] were wrong in not devoting the requisite attention to the problems of developing Asia".

J. Nehru.

New importance of Asia

Nations, like individuals, tend to be egocentric. Each of them looks at the world from its geographical angle and through nationally-coloured glasses. So does India. Looking out at the world from Delhi, India tends naturally to give greater importance to Asia and to Asian problems. And to her, this seems perfectly natural. "A country, said Mr. Nehru, develops its world view or its political or international view, not only because of factors like history, tradition etc... but because of geography". As India has to take a world view from Delhi, "naturally it looks first of all to the countries round India, then further afield".¹ And looking at the world structure from the vantage point of Delhi, India feels greatly dissatisfied with the inferior position reserved to Asia.

Until the emergence of Asia on the world scene, world affairs were predominated by Europe. In the past, said Mr. Nehru, foreign affairs meant "the projection of the European point of view on the world" and thinking on world affairs was "Europe-centered", "American-centered", or "Moscow-centered". It was regular practice for the affairs of Asia to be determined by certain great powers in Europe or in America, and "the fact that the people of Asia might have any views about those subjects was not considered a matter of very great importance"; further, it seemed to be "the high privilege" of the countries outside Asia "to carry the burden of Asia on their shoulders", and repeatedly things happened and decisions were made affecting Asia in which Asia had little say.²

¹ *Parl. Deb.*, 1958, vol. 11, part 2, February 10, col. 1378-79.

² *Ibid.*, 1955, vol. 2, part 2, March 31, col. 3889.

³ *Ibid.*

Yet, in India's view, the world is bigger than Europe, and the problems of the world cannot be solved by thinking that "they are mainly European problems". European problems, no doubt, are important, but in the perspective of things to come, "it is wrong not to devote the requisite attention to the problems of developing Asia", for Asia counts in world affairs, and "tomorrow it will count much more than to-day", Mr. Nehru told the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. ⁴

In the view of Mr. Nehru, the situation in Asia has changed radically. Asia is emerging from its colonial status, and this "resurgence of Asia" is inevitably making a difference in the balance of forces in the world. The old equilibrium has been upset and can never be restored. Asia has changed and has "found herself again", and it is well that this change is recognised. There had been reluctance to accept the great changes that had come over Asia, Mr. Nehru deplored. There is still an attempt, he said, to treat the great nations of Asia "in the same way". But the emergence of new Asia is "a fact of the age", and this change must be recognised if we are to deal realistically with the world to-day. Difficulties arose, and still continued to trouble the world, Mr. Nehru said, because the United Nations did not recognise this fact. ⁵

A consequence of the failure to recognise the new importance of Asia is that not enough weight is given to it in the councils of nations. Asia is given a "backseat", and in the councils of the United Nations even, the problems of Asia, the "outlook of Asia" had failed to evoke, said Mr. Nehru, "the enthusiasm they should". Matters affecting Asia, it is thought by the great powers, can be solved "minus Asia", without Asian participation. This is rather "odd" to Mr. Nehru. Further, certain matters affecting Asia directly and essentially were "blocked" in the United Nations by non-Asian nations. This, in Mr. Nehru's view, is "flouting the will of Asia," and he warned that "the countries of Asia, however weak they might be, do not propose to be ignored, by-passed and sat upon", ⁶ and "Asia's fate cannot be decided by others without Asia's concurrence and good-will". ⁷

Another point stressed by India is that Asia is no longer prepared to accept to play a minor role in world affairs or to become "the battleground of Europe". Asia does not intend to be "the plaything of others", or to be used as "pawns" by them, and "the business of Europe carrying warfare in Asia" should cease, said Mr. Nehru. The story of Asian nations being "petitioners in Western courts and chanceries" must belong to the past, he said, and Asia proposes to "stand on her legs". The Asian nations are bound to have their own policies in world affairs, and in the atomic age, Asia will have to

⁴ *Speeches*, I, p. 319.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, p. 241.

⁷ Speech at Ecafe meeting, Bangalore, February 2, 1956. *India News*, February 11, 1956.

function effectively in the maintenance of peace. The countries of Asia may not have taken much part in world affairs in the past, Mr. Nehru said, but "they are awake, their people are moving, and they have no intention of being ignored or passed by".⁸ Further, the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace. "Indeed, said Mr. Nehru, there can be no peace unless Asia plays a part".⁹

Not only does India want the emergence of new Asia and its importance as a factor for peace to be recognised, but she also wants to see no reversal of the process of liberation of Asia from colonialism. To India, Asia should be free, and there should be no interference or attempt at domination. The political struggle of Asia is largely over, but not entirely. The sooner it is realised that politically every country in Asia should be completely free and be in a position to follow its own genius within a larger world policy, the better it will be. One thing is certain, said Mr. Nehru, "there will be no peace in any part of Asia if there is a tendency for another country to dominate over an Asian country by force". Yet, such attempts continue to be made in parts of Asia, he said, and, to him, they seem not only "undesirable", but "singularly lacking in foresight", because "there can be but one end to their attempts and that is complete elimination of any kind of foreign control".¹⁰ India "reacts strongly" to anything that evokes the return of any European or American country to Asia.¹¹ India, said Mr. Nehru, has no intention to "stomach" foreign occupation anywhere.

India and Asia

When one talks of Asia, said Mr. Nehru, one has to remember India, not because of any ambition of hers, but because of "the forces of circumstances, because of geography, because of history, and because of many other things". If India recognises that the resurgence of Asia is "the biggest fact of the modern world" and an event which has upset the old world equilibrium, she also recognises that this development affects India, because India is in Asia, and, even more so, because she is in a strategic part of Asia, set in the centre of the Indian Ocean, with intimate past and present connections with Western, South Eastern and Far Eastern Asia. "Even if we could, said Mr. Nehru, we would not want to ignore this fact"...¹²

Geography, said Mr. Nehru, is a "compelling factor", and India is so situated as to be "the pivot of Asia". India is "a meeting point" of Western, Eastern and South Eastern Asia. If one has to consider any question affecting any of these regions, Mr. Nehru said, India

⁸ *Speeches*, I, p. 241.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 310.

¹¹ *Parl. Deb.*, 1954, vol. 1, part 2, February 19, col. 433.

¹² *Speeches*, II, p. 146.

“inevitably” comes into the picture, and “whatever regions you may have in mind, the importance of India cannot be ignored”.¹³ Because of this central position, India is the “meeting ground” between the various trends and forces, and between the East and the West. For these reasons, said Mr. Nehru, India has to play “a very important part” in Asia, “whether she likes it or not”. It is not to her liking, he added, but “we just can’t choose in the matter”. India, in Southern, Western, and South Eastern Asia, has to play “a distinctive role”, and if she is not capable of playing it properly she will “fade out”, and, assured Mr. Nehru, “there is no question of India fading out”.¹⁴

This “inevitably” is explained as a consequence of India’s emergence in world affairs. Indians view their country as one of the four largest political units in the world, considering her potential resources and the capacity to use them. India, said Mr. Nehru, is “a country of substance and importance”, and this, coupled with her situation, makes it “quite impossible” for her to keep away from many things that happen in various parts of the world. Her emergence in world affairs is “something of major consequence” in world history. She is becoming “a giant again”, and thus, in spite of her weakness, said Mr. Nehru, she has to work “for great causes” and perhaps elevating herself in the process.¹⁵

Mr. Nehru denied India’s desire to become actor on the world stage, or to “play a big part” in international affairs. He explained India’s assuming responsibilities in world affairs in terms of “the compulsion of events”, or of “some conspiracy of fate” which thrust her in that position,¹⁶ and made her play a leading part in the preservation of peace and the championing of Asian freedom.

India has always viewed her freedom as part of a larger freedom. Even before independence came, Indian leaders had turned their thoughts to the liberation of Asia by India. Gandhi, it has been noted above,¹⁷ conceived his nationalism as extending beyond the frontiers of his country, to the liberation of the weaker races from Western exploitation.

Mr. Nehru, for his part, also conceived India’s freedom as a symbol of a larger freedom. Even while in jail, he devoted much thought to this subject. To him, not only in China, but throughout Asia, Egypt and the Middle East, Indian freedom had become “a symbol of a larger freedom” for other subject and dependent countries, “a test in the present and a measuring rod in the future”. What happened in India had compelled the world to look at India for a while, even in the midst of the war crisis, and to think of the basic problem of the East. India’s fight for freedom had “stirred the mind and heart of every country of Asia”. And even though, for the moment, the Indian people appeared

¹³ *Speeches*, I, p. 236.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 117.

¹⁵ *Parl. Deb.*, Legislative Assembly, 1949, vol. 2, part 2, March 8, p. 1228.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1953, vol. 10, part 2, December 23, col. 2965.

¹⁷ See chapter 2, p. 47.

helpless in the grip of British imperialism, they had demonstrated that "there would be no peace in India or in Asia unless India was free".¹⁸ During his visit to Malaya in March 1946, Mr. Nehru pledged that once India was free, "every ounce of her energy shall be used for the freedom of all subject nations", and said that "some day, every Indian arm will be a strong arm, and those arms will fight for Asiatic freedom".¹⁹

On taking over the reins of government, Mr. Nehru immediately turned his thoughts to India's sister nations of Asia. In a declaration to the press on September 27, 1946, a few days after the installation of the first Indian National Government, he said that India would uphold the principle of freedom for dependent peoples and would oppose racial discrimination wherever it might occur. So far as India's neighbours are concerned, Mr. Nehru said, India will watch "with close interest" the developments of events in Palestine, Iran, Indonesia, China, Siam and Indochina as well as the foreign possessions in India itself, "with every sympathy" for the aspirations of the peoples of these lands or attainment of international peace, freedom, and their "due place" in the comity of nations.²⁰

The same thought ran through the pronouncements of the Indian National Congress since 1947, and even before that date. Thus, a resolution passed by this Congress at its session at Jaipur in 1948 stated that the foreign policy of India must necessarily be based on the principles that had guided the Congress in past years and that these principles were "the promotion of world peace, the freedom of all nations, racial equality and the ending of imperialism and colonialism". In particular, the Congress was interested in "the freedom of the nations and peoples of Asia and Africa who have suffered under various forms of colonialism for many generations".²¹ Three years earlier, in December 1945, the Working Committee of the Congress issued a manifesto stating that India would always throw her weight on the side of world peace and co-operation and that she would champion the freedom of other subject nations and peoples, for "only on the basis of this freedom and the elimination of imperialism everywhere can peace be established".²²

Being the first Asian nation to be emancipated from colonial rule and to be admitted to the council of nations, India considered it her duty to speak on behalf and in defence of the other Asian nations still under colonial domination. Thus, in 1948, Mr. Nehru warned the United Nations of the dangers of continuing colonialism. "After all that has happened, he said, there is going to be no mere objection to that, but active objection, and active struggle against any and every form of colonialism in any part of the world". He reminded his

¹⁸ Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 504.

¹⁹ *The Times* (London), March 20, 1946.

²⁰ In P. Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, vol. II, appendix V.

²¹ *Background of India's Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

²² Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, vol. II, appendix 1.

audience that India herself had suffered all the evils of colonialism and imperial domination. For this reason, India had committed herself "inevitably" to the freedom of every other colonial country and looked with sympathy at her neighbouring countries. Any power, big or small, he said, which in any way prevents the attainment of freedom of those peoples, does an ill turn to world peace. "Great countries, like India, who have passed out of that colonial stage, he said, do not conceive it possible that other countries should remain under the yoke of colonialism".²³

Asian Federation

Apart from fighting for the freedom of her sister nations of Asia, India sought also to renew contact with them. India's contacts with her neighbours were broken off in the XVI century by the intrusion of Europe into South East Asia, and by the establishment of British rule in India itself. For over a hundred years, India's relations, economic, cultural, as well as political, were directed Westwards rather than Eastwards. It is therefore natural to expect that, as soon as she had gained her freedom, she would seek to "pick up the thread" of her relations with the Asian countries again. A concrete step in this direction was taken when she convened the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947, five months before the full transfer of powers from Britain to India. To some extent, this conference was the logical outcome of the idea of an Asian Union with which Indian leaders had toyed for many years.

The idea of an Asian Union or Asian Federation had always exerted a powerful influence on the minds of Indians. In 1918, the Aga Khan proposed the creation of a "Southern Asiatic Federation" with India as the pivot and which would extend from Aden to Tibet, Malaya and Singapore.²⁴ In 1926, S. Iyengar, president of the Indian National Congress, suggested to the annual session of this body the setting up of a "Federation of Asiatic Democracies". "The time has perhaps come for us, he said, to think of a Federation of the Asiatic Peoples for their common welfare". Such a federation, he said, would make for peace, prosperity, and freedom of Asia, and therefore came within the range of practical politics. To him, signs were not wanting that India's neighbours took an interest in her, and she must reciprocate it. In order to promote better understanding and closer relations between India and other Asiatic countries, he suggested frequent interchanges of visits by appropriate delegations, as well as other steps. "We have too long neglected the possibilities of a cultural and business union with all Asiatic countries" he said.²⁵

²³ *Speeches*, I, pp. 319-20.

²⁴ Werner Levi, *Free India in Asia*, p. 32.

²⁵ Quoted in Indian Council of World Affairs, *India and the United Nations*, p. 11.

The idea of an Asian Union was taken up again at the annual session of the Congress in Calcutta in 1928 which passed a resolution directing its Working Committee to "correspond with the leaders and representatives of other Asiatic nations and to take other steps to summon the first session of a Pan-Asiatic Federation in 1930 in India".²⁶ In December 1945, the Congress took up the same idea again in its manifesto, which stated that "in international affairs the Congress stands for the establishment of a world federation of free nations", and that till such time as such world federation would take shape, "India must develop friendly relations with all nations and particularly with her neighbours". In the Far East, in South East Asia and in Western Asia, the resolution continued, India had had trade and cultural relations "for thousand of years" and it was "inevitable" that with freedom she would renew and develop these relations. "Reasons of security and future trends of trade also demand closer contacts with these nations" added the resolution.²⁷

The above line of thought was also entertained by prominent Indians outside the Congress. In May 1946, K.M. Panikkar wrote that the urge for regional organisation was "almost imperative" and, while denouncing the Japanese concept of "East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" as "nothing more than a polite phraseology for Lebensraum", he found that "essentially, the idea is attractive".²⁸ A few months later, in August 1946, Mr. Nehru, speaking about inter-Asian relations, visioned a world divided into two or three "huge" federations, with India as the centre of one of them.²⁹ This idea, Mr. Nehru had also expressed earlier. In 1936, while still in jail, he had already visioned the future in the form of a federation including China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Afghanistan, "and possibly other countries".³⁰ Again, in 1940, he thought of the possibility of an Eastern Federation, not hostile to the West, but "standing on its own feet", self-reliant and comprising China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Nepal, Afghanistan, Malaya, and, he wrote, "there is no reason why Siam and Iran should also not join, as well as some other nations..."³¹

After India had achieved full independence, the idea of an Asian Federation or Union ceased to occupy a prominent place in the statements of Indian statesmen. At the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947, this loss of interest had already become apparent. At this conference, Mr. Nehru suggested the setting up of an Institute for the study of common problems, or a School of Asian studies, but did not mention the idea of an Asian Federation or Union. Nor did

²⁶ *Background of India's Foreign Policy*, p. 7.

²⁷ Sitaramayya, *The History of the National Congress*, vol. II, appendix I.

²⁸ K.M. Panikkar, "Regionalism and World Security", *India Quarterly*, May 1946, pp. 120-21.

²⁹ Nehru, "Inter-Asian Relations", *India Quarterly*, October-December 1946, p. 327.

³⁰ Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, p. 367.

³¹ Nehru, *The Unity of India*, p. 327.

he do so at the Conference on Indonesia in January 1949, at which he simply suggested the need for the free countries of Asia to think of "some more permanent arrangement" for effective mutual consultation and concerted effort in the pursuit of common aims. Likewise, in subsequent conferences, in particular at the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in April 1955, nothing was suggested by India in the direction of a Federation or Union.

Asianism

Instead of joining Asian nations in a Union or Federation, India joined the Commonwealth in 1949, a predominantly European association at the time. And thereafter, she pursued a policy of support for the United Nations on the one hand, and consultation between the leaders of Asian countries on the other, in particular with her immediate neighbours, Burma, Indonesia, Ceylon and Pakistan. With these countries, and in particular with Indonesia and Burma, India sought to work out a common approach to world problems, and to arrive at a common policy in regard to Asian problems. In the United Nations, the Indian delegation cooperated closely with the nations of the so-called "Afro-Asian" bloc.³² But it stressed at the same time that such a "bloc" was not a political grouping, but consisted of states holding widely different political views and belonging to different alliances, and India's co-operation with them was based only on their common approach to the general questions of racial discrimination and colonial authority.³³

India's attitude since 1947 has been to deny the existence of such a thing as Asian unity. It is not quite correct to think of Asia as a compact unit, Mr. Nehru told the United States Congress in 1949. There is not very much common, he said between the Chinese and those who live in Western Asia. They represent entirely different cultural, historical and other backgrounds.³⁴ To him, such terms as "asianism" are very beautiful, but have no meaning. Asia has no geographical, political or cultural unity, he said. It is a "mighty continent", divided up into great countries, big and small. To put these countries together and call it "Asianism" has no meaning to him.³⁵

Although Mr. Nehru denied the existence of such a thing as "Asianism" in the geographical, historical or political sense, he admitted that there is such a thing as "Asian sentiment", and that the Indian, wherever he may go in Asia, may feel a "sense of kinship" with the lands and people he meets. This sense of kinship, he explained, springs from a common experience over a long period, common experience of suffering, and being subjected to colonial domination. For

³² In 1950 this "bloc" comprised fifteen countries: India, Afghanistan, Burma, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi-Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Thailand, the Philippines, Ethiopia.

³³ K.M. Panikkar, *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 5.

³⁴ *Speeches*, II, p. 716.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

this reason, he said, the countries of Asia are psychologically and morally nearer each other, can understand each other better, and thus it is easier for them to interpret each other's reactions.³⁶

Because of the existence of this Asian sentiment, Indians can claim to understand Asians better than do Europeans, as India is Asian. Indians or Asians, said Mr. Nehru, may have a better understanding of the inner problem of mind and spirit that trouble Asia and which will ultimately determine her action; they are in a better position to understand their neighbours in Asia than the nations which have an entirely different cultural heritage. To Mr. Nehru, Western countries lack subtlety of thought in understanding the East or in dealing with it.³⁷

Indian leadership

However, to say that India understands Asian countries better than do Europeans does not mean that India claims to be the spokesman for Asia, or that she would represent Asian opinion outside India. "I make no claim to speak for anyone outside India", said Mr. Nehru. He only claims, he insisted, to speak for himself, for the government of India, and for the majority of the Indian people.³⁸ India also disclaims any desire for leadership in Asia. Talking of India being the leader of Asia greatly irritates Mr. Nehru. He does not understand, he said, why people abroad should worry so much about it. India has championed freedom and racial equality in Asia and Africa, he explained, because this is a "natural urge of the facts of geography and history", but, he affirmed, "we have no desire for leadership anywhere".³⁹ People talk about India's desire for leadership in Asia, he said, but he deprecated such "vague talk". He only wanted the problem to be approached "not in terms of this country or that country being the leader and pushing or pulling others, but rather in a spirit of cooperation among all the countries of Asia, big or small". For a country to think in terms of leadership "smacks too much of a superiority complex", he said.⁴⁰

In spite of his repudiations and his cautiousness, now and then Mr. Nehru would go out of his way to admit that "however unworthy" India may be, she has become the "leader of the freedom movement in Asia," and "whatever we do, he said, we think of ourselves in these larger terms",⁴¹ that responsibilities are "thrust" upon India, that India's freedom is "significant for India, Asia and the world", and that "the eyes of the world and the hope of the world are upon India".⁴² If, to him, it is foolish to speak loosely about India becoming "the leader of this and the leader of that", or the leader of Asia, and if he does not like "this

³⁶ *Parl. Deb.*, 1953, vol. 10, part 2, December 23, col. 2966-67.

³⁷ *Speeches*, II, pp. 162-63.

³⁸ *Parl. Deb.*, 1953, vol. 10, part 2, December 23, col. 2966.

³⁹ *Speeches*, II, p. 116.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 316.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I, p. 35.

business of leadership” because it is a “bad approach”, he admits that it is true that “a certain responsibility is cast upon India”. However, he insisted, this responsibility is not necessarily for leadership, but for “taking the initiative sometimes and helping others to cooperate”, and India realises it, and other countries realise it also.⁴³

If Mr. Nehru is cautious and hesitant in his approach to the question of India's leadership, his colleagues in the government and his supporters in Parliament are more outspoken and more aggressive about it. His own sister, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, has taken the position that “whether the Prime Minister wishes to assume leadership or not, India has assumed leadership”.⁴⁴ Another member of the Indian government, S.K. Patil, on returning from a trip to Malaya, said in Bombay in 1957 that “the dependent countries looked to India to lead the way to prosperity and economic independence”.⁴⁵ Mr. M. Gautam, one time general secretary of the Indian National Congress, speaking of India's “valiant and persistent defence” of Indonesia to free existence, said that it had drawn the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa towards India and had made her “the potential leader of Asian countries”. The postwar demoralisation of Japan and the preoccupation of China with her internal troubles, he said, gave India “a unique chance to assert this leadership”.⁴⁶

In Parliament, the supporters of Mr. Nehru, as well as the members of the opposition, frequently referred to him as “the spokesman for the aspirations of Asia”, “the symbol of Asia”, “the real voice of Asia”, and to India as “a stabilising factor” in Asia, “the leader of Asia”, “a country to which Asiatic peoples look for inspiration and guidance”. These supporters have urged Mr. Nehru to exercise leadership and not to “play a second, third or fourth fiddle of any bloc politics”, and so far as the affairs of the Asian continent are concerned, at least to make it India's obligation “to see to it that no country in Asia falls victim to bloc politics”, because it is believed that “this leadership and policy of neutrality will lead India and the whole world to security, peace, liberty, and a bright future”.⁴⁷ Mr. Nehru has also been urged to “collect the small nations and weld them together”, so that India may be able to “balance the world situation” more in favour of peace. Mr. Nehru has been reminded also that India has “the special responsibility in forming public opinion on international affairs in Asia”.⁴⁸

The desire of many Indians to see India assume leadership in Asia springs from the fact that India has been the “mother country” of this area, on account of several centuries of cultural predominance. Indian writers have proudly referred to South East Asia as “Greater India”, or

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 256.

⁴⁴ *Parl. Deb.*, 1953, vol. 10, part 2, December 23, col. 3013.

⁴⁵ *India News*, September 14, 1957.

⁴⁶ M. Gautam, “India's Foreign Policy: The Congress View”, *India Quarterly*, January-March, 1951, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Dr. S. Sinha. *Parl. Deb.*, 1954, vol. 2, part 2, March 23, col. 2925.

⁴⁸ Mrs Sucheta Kripalani. *Parl. Deb.*, 1953, vol. 2, part 2, March 16, col. 2118.

“Further India”, or “External India”. The name is significant in that it contains a basic assumption, and the assumption is that, historically, this area has been an area of Indian influence, and belonged to the Indian world. If it is the work of European scholars, especially of French and Dutch scholars, which has revealed to Indians the existence of Indian influence far beyond the borders of India, to-day, the idea of a world with India at its centre has a tremendous appeal to Indian minds, it focuses Indian attention on the importance of South East Asia to India, especially at a time when India is emerging again as a major power in the world and as the biggest power of this area.

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Indian's cultural interest in South East Asia

Before South East Asia and India fell under the control of Europe, India had extended its cultural influence to this area, eastwards into Burma, Thailand, the Indochina peninsula; southeastwards into Malaya and the Indonesian islands, and from there, northeastwards as far as the Philippines. India's cultural expansion in this region began in the centuries preceding the Christian era, and, by the II century A.D., strongly indianised kingdoms were in existence there. In the Indochina peninsula, there were Funan and Champa, two powerful and prosperous kingdoms. In the Malay peninsula, there were several hindu Kingdoms, of which the most important was Nakhon Sri Dharmmasat.

After an eclipse in the III and IV centuries, Indian cultural expansion resumed in the V and continued to flower until the XV century. It is during this period that we witness the rise of the Khmer Empire (now Cambodia) in Indochina, and in the South Seas, the emergence of the powerful Sailendra, Shrivijaya and Madjapahit Empires. Burma, Thailand and Laos also came into the Indian cultural orbit through their adoption of Buddhism. Indian cultural influence left a deep mark not only on the cultural and social life of the inhabitants of South East Asia, but also on its landscape in the shape of gigantic monuments like Angkor in Cambodia, and Borobudur in Indonesia.⁴⁹

The result of the long process of “hinduisation” of the countries of South East Asia is the deep penetration of the life of these countries by Indian civilisation, which gave them an “air de famille”, as G. Coedès put it. The features of this “hinduisation” are: a concept of royalty based on hindu and buddhist cult; the mythology of the Puranas; the observance of the Dharmasmastras; the use of Sanskrit as a means of expression; the use of alphabets of Indian origin; the pattern of Indian law and administration; the persistence of certain brahmanic traditions even in the countries converted to Islam or Singhalese Buddhism; the presence of monuments connected by their architecture and their sculp-

⁴⁹ See Hall, *A History of South East Asia*, chapter I; and K.M. Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, chapter 8.

ture to the arts of India, and bearing inscriptions in Sanskrit.⁵⁰ In spite of the impact of Western conquest and rule, the pattern of Indian influenced customs and thought has survived till the present day.

South East Asia's strategic importance to India

Before British conquest, India was relatively secure. It was well protected in the North by the formidable barrier of the Himalayas. It had no enemies to fear from the sea. There were many invasions from the North West but these invasions did not extend to the whole country. British rule brought unity to India, but it also created many new problems, especially in the inter-war period, by drawing India into the sweep of international politics.⁵¹

Throughout the British period, the Northern and North Eastern frontier was uneventful. It was the "forgotten frontier". China, India's neighbour in that area, was never strong. The Franco-British *entente* ensured peace and tranquillity on India's Eastern borders. British preoccupation was with the North West frontier from which Britain feared Russian penetration. But here, Curzon's policy of "Buffer States" ensured relative security also. On the sea, British naval power ruled the waves. It was reinforced by the Anglo-Japanese naval treaty (1902-20) and the Anglo-American understanding. India's Southeastern flank was covered by the Dutch occupation of Indonesia, and her South Western flank by British control of South Africa. Russia was a weak naval power. Thus, there was no threat to India from the sea. These factors combined to breed in Indian minds a "Maginot Line mentality".

World War I shattered India's complacency. With the decline of British sea power, with the rise of Japan as a major power and no longer an ally of Britain after the termination of Anglo-Japanese naval treaty in 1920, and with the installation of Italy on the eastern shores of Africa, India was made to play an increasingly important role in the defence of the British Empire. It was the base of British power in South East Asia and the Far East as well as the Middle East. India's vast manpower made her play the role of a strategic reserve in the defence plans of the British Empire.

In the inter-war years strategic thinking in India shifted from the North West to the North East and the South East. As B.L. Sharma pointed out,

"An epoch-making reappraisal of India's strategic situation took place. A new emphasis was laid on India's Oceanic involvements in power relations. Her strategic interests widened considerably; and this formed the matrix of a new awareness which was to characterise future policies...

⁵⁰ G. Coedès, *Les Etats Hindouises d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, pp. 2 and 36.

⁵¹ For a comprehensive analysis of Indian strategic problems, see B.V.L. Sharma, *The Strategic Aspect of India's Foreign Policy*, in particular chapters 1-3; and Brigadier D.H.F. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography*, chapter 9.

it was inevitable that India's geographical location would give to her people a sense of affinity with lands lying across the Indian Ocean, counterbalancing the effect of her continental environment".⁵²

Japan's invasion of South East Asia and its direct threat to India confirmed the correctness of the strategic thinking in India in the inter-war years. The Japanese thrust towards India along the Imphal-Kohima front, for the first time in Indian history, shifted the focus from the North West to the North East, as well as to the South East, where Japan had spread out from Singapore, southwards into Indonesia, and Northward into Burma through Thailand.

The fall of Singapore in 1942 brought about a new strategic thinking in India. A considerable number of Indians began to take an interest in defence matters. Attention was focused on the basic fact about India's security: India's position in the midst of the Indian Ocean, and her dependence for its security on the security of the countries along the rim of this Ocean.

In the postwar period, new factors added to the problems of India's security. South East Asia was in a state of turmoil. The withdrawal of the colonial powers left a certain power vacuum in this area. The emergence of China as a powerful and aggressive state was confirmed by its military intervention in Korea, its professed intention of assisting the "liberation movements" in South East Asia, and its military occupation of Tibet. Moreover, conditions of modern warfare had changed, thereby affecting India's problem of defence. As K.M. Panikkar has written,

"The present war has altered the character of Indian defence... it has extended the geography of defence so far as India is concerned. The outer rim on which India's security was based — the Ring Fence system — inherited from the Company, must now, with the increasing range of modern weapons, extend beyond the buffer-states of Curzon".⁵³

Yet, while conditions of modern warfare have added to the problems of India's defence, they have not altered it basically. These were stated Lord Curzon as follows:

"India is like a fortress... if rival and unfriendly influences move up to it and lodge themselves under our walls, we are compelled to intervene, because a danger would grow up that one day might menace our security. That is the secret of our whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and as far eastwards as Siam. He would be a shortsighted commander who merely manned his ramparts in India and did not look beyond".⁵⁴

⁵² Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁵³ K.M. Panikkar, "Defence and National Efficiency", *The Asiatic Review*, July 1945, p. 293.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Guy Wint, in *The British in Asia*, p. 24.

Commenting on the strategic importance of South East Asia to India, Major Anthony Strachey, a former officer of the Indian Army, wrote in 1947 that this area was comparable to Tibet and Nepal.

“That either of these two states should come under the influence of any hostile or potentially hostile power would mean an intolerable threat to the new India’s security. Looking South-East, the same applies to Burma, Siam, French Indochina, and the East Indies. The lesson of the last war is surely that India must always take adequate precautions that her eastern neighbours do not become the springboard for yet another attack on her...”⁵⁵

From the point of view of national security, India occupies a certain geographic position in the South East Asian area, and certain strategic consequences flow from this position.

India, as C.H. Philips has pointed out, is shaped like “an enormous diamond” pointed to the North and the South. The two northernmost edges form the Himalayas. The southernmost point juts out into the Indian Ocean. The Himalayas constitute a barrier to the North, but the Southern point gives India a prominent position in the Indian Ocean and links her with Persia, Africa on the one side, and with South East Asia and Australia on the other. It thus constitutes “the strategic centre of a quarter of the world”.⁵⁶ One can also view India, as does K.M. Panikkar, as a subcontinent jutting out for a thousand miles into the Indian Ocean and constituting an area “walled off” on three sides by land, with the southern side of Asia forming a roof over it. Africa is its western, and Burma and Malaya, its eastern wall.⁵⁷ India may also be viewed as “a bowl whose rim is formed by the bordering rimlands”;⁵⁸ or an arc whose “geographical and strategic keystone” is the subcontinent of India.⁵⁹

Whatever the angle from which the defence of India is viewed, its *regional* character is obvious. This fact has led Panikkar to suggest the idea of an “Indian security sphere” covering the entire Indian Ocean area, and to write that “India’s interest in the security of the Persian Gulf, the integrity and stability of Persia and Afghanistan, the neutralisation of Sinkiang and Tibet, and security of Burma, Siam and the Indochinese coastline, apart of course from Malaya and Singapore, is obvious to all”.⁶⁰ As early as 1943, Sir Syed S. Ahmed, a prominent Indian, had written:

“The loss of Singapore had exposed the coastline of India to combined air and naval attacks from the sea; Malaya, Singapore, Indochina and

⁵⁵ Major Anthony Strachey, “Some Aspects of the Future Defence of India”, *The Asiatic Review*, January 1947, p. 122.

⁵⁶ Philips, *India*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ K.M. Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Indian council of World Affairs, *Defence and Security in The Indian Ocean Area*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Cole, *Imperial Military Geography*, p. 149.

⁶⁰ Panikkar, *Problems of Indian Defence*, p. 86.

Burma were, therefore, in the East a sphere of vital interest to India analogous to Afghanistan and Iran in the West. A hostile power in Cam-Ranh Bay would be no less dangerous than it would be in the Persian Gulf. What happened in Bangkok was of as much interest to India as what happened in Basra".⁹⁸

On the other hand, the fact that India is surrounded on three sides by the sea is considered a serious matter which cannot be dismissed and which has prompted General K. Cariappa, a former Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, to write:

"To India, the security of this region is of paramount importance, as Oceanic routes across this Ocean carry the bulk of her overseas trade. If these routes came under the control of countries not friendly to India, this would threaten her very independence..."⁹⁹

India's strategic interest in the countries of South East Asia naturally varies in direct proportion to the proximity of these countries to her. Thus, Burma has the greatest importance to India from the strategic viewpoint. The occupation of Burma by a hostile country would represent a direct threat to the security of India. Apart from the possibility of a direct attack on India on land, Burma's importance to Indian defence lies in the control on the Bay of Bengal and the defence of Singapore. In the circumstances of modern air and naval warfare, the occupation of Rangoon, Akyab and the Andamans would paralyse India's coastal communications without even a major air attack. Moreover, Calcutta and the entire eastern sea board of India are within bombing range of Burma. So are the Jhavia coalfields and the Tata iron mines, as well as a large part of India's heavy industries which are concentrated in the North East. Lastly, a power established in Burma will inevitably extend its authority to Malaya and Singapore and cut off India's access to the Pacific and the Far East.

Because Burma is not a major military power and is in no position to defend itself, the defence of Burma is integrally bound up with the defence of India and has to be considered in terms of the Indian military problem, said K.M. Panikkar. Countering the argument that the defence of Burma is a burden on India, he dismissed it as fallacious as

"the defence of Burma is in fact the defence of India, and it is India's primary concern no less than Burma's to see to it that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma. India needs Burma's oil for her navy and air force, and for this reason, if for no other, Burma's defence has to form part of India's own defence".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Sir Syed S. Ahmed, *A Treaty between India and the United Kingdom*, quoted by Sharma, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁹ Major General K.M. Cariappa, Preface to *Defence and Security in the Indian Ocean Area*.

¹⁰⁰ Panikkar, *The Future of South East Asia*, p. 46.

In this connection, it should be recalled that if the Japanese entered Burma through Thailand in the East, they were ejected from that country by the Allied forces from India in the West, and from China in the North. In other words, Burma can also be invaded from the North, and no less than its eastern frontiers, Burma's northern frontiers represent a security problem for India.

Further east, Thailand also plays an important role in the defence of India, either directly as a jumping board for a land attack on India through Burma, or indirectly, by paralysing India's lines of communications through the conquest and control of Malaya and Singapore. It was Thailand's participation in the war on the side of Japan which made the conquest of Burma and the fall of Malaya and Singapore possible. K.M. Panikkar wrote:

"Without a safe land base behind her the spectacular advance through the Malaya peninsula would have been impossible. Equally it was the threat to the flanks of the British Army in Burma from the Japanese in Thailand that forced the retreat of the British and Indian forces."¹⁰¹

Further east still, the states of Indochina constitute a line of outer defence for India. The security of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, is important to India by its repercussion on Thailand and Malaya-Singapore. These countries control the land routes towards Thailand and Malaya, and Vietnam occupies also a commanding position in respect of a sea and air attack on Singapore, from which it is separated but by three hours' flight by air and twenty four hours by sea. A power which controls the Indochina peninsula would be in a position to threaten India both through Thailand and Burma on the one hand, and through Malaya-Singapore on the other. And a power in control of Singapore would be equally in a position to control Indonesia and thus cut off India from access to the sea routes to the Far East, the Pacific and Australia, and endanger India's economy, which depends for no small part on supplies from these areas.

Looking back at the history of South East Asia before the European conquest, K.M. Panikkar credited Kambuja (Cambodia) and Champa (now South Vietnam) with "exceptional claims to the gratitude of the Indian people" for having barred the land route of Chinese expansion for a thousand years. He wrote:

"If ever the expanding Empire of China did not extend its authority to Singapore and if the Indian Ocean remains today what its name indicates, it is due to the resistance which Kambuja and Champa put up against the continuous pressure of China".¹⁰²

India has also reason to be grateful to Indonesia, said Panikkar, for, if the land route of Chinese expansion was barred by the kingdoms

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰² Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, p. 96.

of Further India, "the glory of guarding the sea route fell to the great dynasties of Sailendra...". For full seven hundred years, from the V to the XII century, the Sailendra Empire held sovereignty over the seas surrounding the islands and upheld Indian culture in the Archipelago.¹⁰³

After the fall of South East Asia to Europe's conquest, it was the European powers which played the role of containing, first Chinese, then Japanese expansion southwards. But with the withdrawal of Europe, it became clear that the burden of the defence of South East Asia would have to be borne by India. In fact, it was India which had been the base and which had supplied the resources and the manpower for the containment of both China and Japan and for their ejection from South East Asia during the period of European rule.

During World War II, Indian soldiers fought in Hongkong, in Burma, in Malaya, and as far as the Borneo jungles.¹⁰⁴ India provided 70 per cent of the British forces which defeated Japan in Burma, and Indian forces constituted 80 per cent of the Commonwealth forces in Malaya, China, French Indochina and Indonesia at the close of the War.¹⁰⁵ Out of over a million men comprising Allied land forces in South East Asia, 700,000 came from the Indian Army; in the air force of the South East Asia Command, there were 9,500 Indians; and among the Allied troops taken prisoner during the war in the Far East, there were 35,000 Indians.¹⁰⁶ A total of 50,000 Indians lost their lives during the War.¹⁰⁷ Whereas at the beginning of it, there were 185,821 Indians under arms, at the end of the war this figure had risen to 2,028,368.¹⁰⁸

India's economic interests in South East Asia

Apart from cultural and strategic considerations, India's interest in South East Asia stems also from the considerable economic stakes which India has in this area. Here again, India's and South East Asia's interdependence is evident. As in the cultural sphere, India has been the dominant economic power of South East Asia. British occupation and rule have not eliminated the logical consequences of India's geography, size and natural resources. On the contrary, these consequences have become still more obvious.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Compton Mackenzie, "The Army in India during the Second World War", *The Asiatic Review*, January 1951, p. 314.

¹⁰⁵ Brigadier J.N. Chadhuri, "The Indian Army", *The Asiatic Review*, January 1947, p. 306.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times* (London), September 5, 1945. Other forces compared with Indian forces are as follows: British: 183,000; West Africans: 77,000; East Africans: 49,000; American: 18,000; Burmese: 10,000. Air Force: American: 23,000; British: 50,000.

¹⁰⁷ Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁸ The effectives of the Indian Army were as follows: 1935: 182,923; 1939: 185,821; 1941: 525,000; 1945: 2,028,368; 1947: 494,140. *Ibid.*

If India has been a market for British goods, it has been also, to a considerable extent, both a major supplier of South East Asia in consumer goods manufactured in India by British capital and Indian capital, labour and enterprise, and a market for the food and raw materials of the area. South East Asia was an important market for Indian textiles, and the British possessions in this area, an important market for Indian consumer goods. Burma was virtually an exclusive Indian market in this respect, while Malaya was an entrepot for Indian goods exported to South East Asia and the Far East.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, India was heavily dependent on Burma, Indonesia, Malaya, Thailand and Indochina for oil, tin, rubber, rice and timber.

In 1938-39, the countries of South East Asia accounted for about 9 per cent of India's total exports. In the first postwar years, the share of these countries in India's exports was as follows: 1946-47: 6%; 1947-48: 6%; 1948-49: 5%; 1949-50: 8%; 1950-51: 12%; 1951-52: 7%.¹¹⁰ In 1950-51, India imported 50 per cent of her rice, 17 per cent of her petroleum, 8 per cent of her metals, 4 per cent of her wood (16 per cent in 1951-52) from South East Asia. Rice, petroleum, wood, accounted for 60 per cent of India's imports from this area before the War, 50 per cent in 1947-48, 80 per cent in 1950-51 and 71 per cent in 1951-52.¹¹¹ India's main exports to South East Asia are jute manufactures and cotton textiles. The percentage of these items in India's total exports to the area are as follows:

TABLE V

*Percentage share of India's Major Exports to South East Asia.*¹¹²

	1938-39	1947-48	1950-51	1951-52
Cotton textiles	28	17	65	18
Jute manufactures ..	20	20	10	35
Coal	4	6	1	2
Vegetable oils	3	8	6	7

Even before the British conquest, India was the largest trading country of South East Asia. "Throughout the first millennium of the Christian era, wrote Mr. Nehru, India's trade was widespread and Indian merchants controlled many foreign markets. It was dominant in the eastern seas and it reached out also to the Mediterranean". Roman writers, he said, bemoaned the fact that gold flowed from Rome to India or through India. This trade was largely one of "give and take" of materials found locally. India was a fertile land and rich in some of the materials that other countries lacked, and the seas being open to her, she sent these materials abroad. India also profited as

¹⁰⁹ B.N. Ganguli, *India's Economic Relations with The Far Eastern and Pacific Countries*, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, see chapter 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

a merchant carrier. India's predominant position in the field of trade was based on her advance in the fields of chemistry, in particular of dyes, and in physics, especially in steel tempering, shipbuilding and in superiority in handicrafts and craftsmanship.¹¹³ India's commercial predominance was made still more secure by the existence of large colonies of Indian merchants established in the countries of this area.¹¹⁴

Foreign conquest, occupation and domination did not change India's predominant position. On the contrary, the introduction of British capital and enterprise and the development of Indian capitalism strengthened India's position still further. On the eve of World War II, India ranked as the eighth industrial power of the world. The War gave a further impetus to the development of India's industries. Today, with independence regained and freedom to develop, India is becoming still more clearly the major economic power of the area.

Rapid economic development means also commercial development, and Indians are now turning their eyes to the neighbouring countries where both the pattern of local consumption and shorter distance give her an advantage over other countries. "It is only the possibility of industrial development in India that offers a chance for the economic recovery of these areas, wrote Panikkar. India lacks the very things these areas produce in abundance, the economies of India and South East Asia can be considered as complementary".¹¹⁵ Panikkar suggested that if a "truly satisfactory economy" is to develop in this area, "it can only be if India and South East Asia work out a "co-prosperity sphere" based on interdependence".¹¹⁶ Another Indian, discussing South East Asia's economic importance to India, wrote:

"From the point of view of the sinews of war, South East Asia, the richest area in the world, is one unit. It produces what India lacks for the defence of the Indian Ocean Zone ... We have what they need and need what they have. In our self-interest alone we must cultivate a close friendship with all these countries".¹¹⁷

The possibility of developing trade with South East Asia was not neglected by Indian businessmen after independence. In 1950, an Indian trade delegation was sent to survey commercial possibilities in South East Asia. On its return, P.A. Narielwala, director of the Tata industries and leader of the delegation, reported that, more than the Middle East, the countries of South East Asia, on account of their larger populations and higher standards of living, made them "rather more important for us for the export of our secondary industries". Another factor in the development of trade between India and these countries was that the economy of India and these countries was "fortunately not competitive

¹¹³ Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹⁴ See below, pp. 75 and ff.

¹¹⁵ Panikkar, *The Future of South East Asia*, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Madan Gopal, *India as a World Power*, p. 76.

but complementary". Most of these countries, he said, were rich in natural resources, many of which India needed as raw materials. "It is therefore possible, he concluded, for the Indian industries to import raw materials from these countries and to export our manufactured goods to meet their requirements, not only of consumer goods but also of industrial products".¹¹⁸

The same trade delegation made the following recommendations to the Indian government:

- 1) India should develop her trade with the South East Asian countries, and "the present is the most opportune time to do so".
- 2) Indian manufacturers should send their representatives to these countries for the purpose of studying the markets and organisation of sale agents;
- 3) Permanent show rooms may be opened in collaboration with representatives of Trade and Industry in certain places in order that Indian goods may be properly displayed;
- 4) Facilities should be afforded to Indian banks and Insurance companies to open their branches in these industries;
- 5) Indian shipping may be developed so that direct sailings to some of the important parts of South East Asia may be provided for facilitating the movement of goods between Indian and these countries.¹¹⁹

India's trade with South East Asia in the postwar period, taken as a whole, occupies a very important place in her overall trade. It ranked third after the United Kingdom and the United States (See table VI). It can be expected that with the rapid economic development of India (See table VII), South East Asia will play a still more important part in India's economic life.

TABLE VI
India's Trade with South East Asia and Major Countries
(Thousand Rupees)

	Countries	1949-50	1950-51	1951-52
IMPORTS	Total Trade	6,173,833	5,891,159	6,449,108
	South East Asia *	415,584	464,166	569,334
	United Kingdom .	1,557,728	1,353,063	1,622,757
	United States . . .	980,937	1,191,640	2,937,724
EXPORTS	Total Trade	4,720,722	5,783,162	7,017,480
	South East Asia .	392,623	668,822	509,350
	United Kingdom .	1,154,914	1,351,560	1,876,330
	United States . . .	796,676	1,301,363	1,107,348

* Burma, Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Indochina, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand.

Source: Compiled from: Government of India, *Statistical Abstract of the Union of India, 1953-54*.

¹¹⁸ P.A. Narielwala, "Trade Prospects with South East Asia", *India Quarterly*, January-March 1950, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Statement by Shri Kamarkar, deputy minister of commerce and industry in Parliament. *Parl. Deb.*, 1951, vol. 6, part 1 February 6, col. 1184-85.

TABLE VII

Index of India's Industrial Production, 1958

Base 1950: 100

General Index: 139.7

<i>Textiles and manufactures</i> .	112.6	<i>Chemicals and chemical products</i>	206.2
Cotton cloth	101.8	Soap	148.0
Cotton yarn	123.1	Matches	108.3
Jute textiles	123.9	Sulfuric acid	211.9
Sugar	175.5	Automobiles	120.3
Paper and Paper board ...	191.8	<i>Rubber products</i>	181.3
Cigarettes	139.1	Tyres	193.0
Coal	132.2	Electricity generated	219.2
<i>Iron and Steel</i>	119.1	Cement	189.9
Finished steel	120.7	<i>General and electrical engineering</i>	254.1
Pig iron and ferro-alloys	115.2	Hurricane lanterns	85.0
<i>Non ferrous metals</i>	116.5	Diesel engines	335.6
Brass	181.7		
Iron Ore	156.3		

Source: *India 1960: A Reference Annual*, p. 310.

Indian immigrants in South East Asia

Apart from trade, India's interests in South East Asia lies in the presence of a large Indian immigrant population there. The size of this population is not known exactly. Estimates of it range from 1.3 to 1.8 millions (See table VIII). Begun in the first century of the Christian era, Indian emigration did not reach any large scale until the occupation of Burma and Malaya by Britain, and the extension of British power and the development of South East Asia by the British and other European powers in the latter half of the XIX century. Large numbers of poor Indians were brought to the countries of this area, in particular to Burma and Malaya, to work on the sugar, tea, coffee and rubber plantations, or in the mines, docks, railways, or ancillary and clerical occupations.

Traders and workers of the liberal professions followed the first migrants, and, little by little, these overseas Indians, by their knowledge, acumen, and energy, came to occupy an important place in the life of the receiving countries. Their position was particularly strong in the economic and administrative spheres of these countries. At the same time they kept to their hindu way of life. For every hundred that stay at home, wrote N.V. Rajkumar, one Indian seeks livelihood overseas.

These Indians have kept their distinctive way of life, and shown tenacity of purpose in keeping their ancient heritage. They have transplanted "an India in miniature" on these distant shores.¹²⁰ This transplantation of an "India in miniature" abroad has a strong appeal to the imagination of the Indians. Mr. Nehru has said of the history of Indian emigration that "it reads like a romance". So it may be, but only to India, and not to the countries containing large colonies of Indian immigrants.

TABLE VIII
Indian population in South East Asia

Country	I		II		III	
	Population	Year of estimation	Population	Year of estimation	Population	Year of estimation
Malaya ...	604,508	1947	720,013	1955	748,829	1940
Singapore .	—		91,029	1954	—	
Burma	700,000	1947	600,000	—	1,017,825	1931
Indochina ..	1,310	1949	2,300	1950	2,000	1949
Indonesia ..	27,638	1940	40,000	1952	24,000	1940
Philippines .	1,258	1948	1,295	1954	800	1948
Thailand ...	20,000	1947	11,235	1955	30,000	1947
Total South Asia	1,354,714		1,465,872		1,823,454	

- I: Estimates by C. Kondapi, *Indian Overseas, 1838-1948*, appendix I.
 II: Estimates by Sadath Ali Khan, parliamentary secretary to the ministry of external affairs, given in Parliament on February 14, 1958.
 III: Estimates by Mr. Nehru, given in Parliament on March 14, 1949.

While the countries of Indian emigration were part of the British Empire, their inhabitants, regardless of their origin, were considered as British subjects, and could move freely from one country to another. Their presence in a foreign country did not attract the attention of the natives unduly, as the minds and energies of the latter were absorbed in the struggle for emancipation from British rule. Thus, the Indian immigrants could live and work, and enrich themselves in these countries in relative peace and security. However, with the achievement of independence and the desire to recover the control over their economies some of those countries discovered, so to speak, the rather unpleasant fact of the presence of a large number of aliens of Indian origin, living in their midst, occupying an extremely important position in their economy, and owning a sizeable share of their national wealth. Fears were roused in those countries of being swamped racially and

¹²⁰ N.V. Rajkumar, *Indians Outside India*, p. 14.

dominated economically by the Indian immigrants. To those countries, now that national independence had been gained, the danger was not the white man, but the brown man, not the British, but the Indian.

Indian leaders are acutely aware of this problem. It is true, Mr. Nehru recognised, that India is a country which, in spite of everything, has abounding vitality and spreads abroad. "We tend to overwhelm others, he said, both by virtue of our numbers, and sometimes, by virtue of the economic position we might develop there".¹²¹ Yet, India cannot refuse their emigrants the protection to which they are entitled as citizens of free India, especially in regard to what is considered their "legitimate" interests.

The expectation of protection by the mother country is all the greater among the Indian emigrants as independent India, being the biggest and the most powerful nation of South East Asia, has the means to afford this protection. Yet, Mr. Nehru has been rather cautious in his approach to this question. "While on the one hand we are obviously intent on protecting the interests of Indians abroad, he said, on the other hand we cannot protect any vested interests which injure the cause of the country they are in". That, he admitted, is the difficulty. Nevertheless, he promised that the Indian government would do its best to protect "legitimate" interests.¹²²

The cautious attitude of Mr. Nehru contrasts sharply with the rather more aggressive attitude of some sections of the Indian National Congress. As early as 1936, the Congress put much hope in the hearts of Indians abroad when it passed a resolution which assured them of "sympathy and help" in their "distressful conditions", and in the continuing deterioration of their status in the territories in which they had settled. The Congress affirmed that it was "ready and willing to take all action in its power" to ameliorate their condition, but pointed out also that a radical amelioration of their status "must ultimately depend on the attainment by India of independence and the power to protect her nationals".¹²³ In 1951, N.V. Rajkumar noted that "from various parts of the world where Indians have settled there comes to-day a cry of anguish and of pain", and deplored that attempts were being made to turn them out of several countries. Especially in those countries where Indians, he said, by dint of enterprise and skill, had brought prosperity and wealth to the whole population, "they are being slowly squeezed out to a greater or lesser extent by those in power there".¹²⁴

The feeling that India had an obligation to protect Indians abroad was all the more strong because of the sense of gratitude towards them. It was the Indians abroad, wrote P. Sitaramayya, who paved

¹²¹ *Speeches*, I, p. 209.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹²³ Quoted in Adloff and Thompson, *Minority Problems in South East Asia*, p. 59.

¹²⁴ Rajkumar, *Indians Outside India*, preface.

the way for Indian emancipation within the frontiers of India. It was the implementation of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi subject to the principles of truth and non-violence over a quarter of a century that made Indian freedom possible. "We therefore owe all that we are, he said, to the initiative, the originality, the daring of Indians abroad".¹²⁵ India felt also grateful to Indians abroad, especially to those in South East Asia, for having taken a prominent part in India's struggle for freedom, by their participation, and their material and financial support for the India Independence League and the Indian National Army (Azad Hind) under the leadership of Netaji C. Bose. Today, Netaji C. Bose is revered in India as a national hero.

The concern for Indians and Indian interests in South East Asia is also understandable in view of the fact that Indian investments in the countries of this area, and Indian remittances from them are not negligible. Precise figures concerning these investments and remittances are not known, but the figures collected and given below give some idea of their magnitude.

TABLE IX

Indian Investments in South East Asia

Country	Year of estimate	Amount (In million Rupees)	Equivalent in million US \$
Malaya	1949	319.4	42.026 (a)
Burma	1949	700	149.059 (b)
Indochina	1946	500	107.143 (c)
Other countries		unknown	

(a) estimate by B.N. Ganguli, *op. cit.*, p. 73-74.

(b) figure given by A.K. Chanda, deputy minister of external affairs in Parliament on February 22, 1954.

(c) figure given by Mr. Nehru in Parliament on May 7, 1954.

TABLE X

Remittances Home from Indians in South East Asia

Countries	Year of estimate	Amount in local currency (thousand units)	Equivalent in thousand US \$
Singapore	1951	Str. \$ 16,360	5,349 (a)
Federation of Malaya ..	1951	Str. \$ 240,000	8,147 (b)
Burma	1947	Rs. 48,000	12,234 (c)
Indochina	1947	Rs. 1,200	1,239 (d)
Other countries		not known	

(a) based on monthly averages estimate given by Adloff and Thompson in *Minority Problems in South East Asia*, p. 69.

(b) *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ P. Sitaramayya, Foreword to R.K. Rajkumar's *Indians Outside India*.

- (c) calculated on the basis of Rs. 40 allowed monthly and per head, and on the basis of one remittance per family of five out of an Indian population of 600,000. In 1950 remittances per month and per head were reduced to Rs. 20; the corresponding figures would be Rs. 24 millions and US \$ 6.1 million.
- (d) calculated on the basis of Rs. 200 allowed per month and per head, and on the basis of one remittance per family of five, the Indian population in Indochina being 2,500.

India's political stake in South East Asia

Apart from cultural, strategic, economic and financial considerations, India's achievement of her internal objectives: the establishment of a democratic, socialist and peaceful society, depends, to some extent, on the political developments in South East Asia. Whatever India plans to develop, she can do so only in a surrounding favourable to this development. "The development of India, said Mr. Nehru, necessitates the development of countries around India".¹²⁶ It is obvious that the prevalence of instability, chaos, and insecurity, as well as the development of communism or the continuance of colonialism in South East Asia would make it difficult for India to function peacefully and achieve her goals at home and abroad.

If colonialism is practically extinct in South East Asia, communism, on the contrary, is a virulent force there. It is a force which, by its militant character, tends to upset the stability of the countries of the area, and thus create a situation unfavourable to India's development, and therefore considered undesirable by her. This feeling was expressed by Sardar V. Patel, home minister and second most powerful member of the Indian government, in a broadcast on August 15, 1948, on the first anniversary of India's independence. V. Patel said:

"China, which at one time was expected to be the leading nation of Asia, had serious troubles... Again, the conditions in Malaya, Indochina, and Burma were disturbing... If the undesirable elements in the country were not put down with a firm hand immediately, they were sure to create the same chaos as they found existing in some other Asiatic countries".¹²⁷

The same anxiety concerning the fate of South East Asia and its repercussions on India was also expressed in 1950 by a number of members of the Indian Parliament when they sought the government's view on the desirability of holding a conference on the defence of South East Asian countries. The questions asked are the following:

N.M. Das: "In view of the disturbing conditions that prevail in these countries, do the Government of India feel the necessity of convening such a conference?"

¹²⁶ *Speeches*, III, p. 99.

¹²⁷ Quoted by P. Dutt in *India Today and Tomorrow*, p. 176.

Shri Rathnaswamy: "May I know if the Government considers it desirable to convene such a conference at a time when the menace of communism is growing in these countries?"

Shri Brajeshwar Prasad: "May I know what other measures the Government proposes to take in order to preserve the integrity of these states?"

Shri Buragohain: "Is it not the policy of this Government to cast its moral and material weight in favour of peaceful and free life in these countries?" ¹²⁸

It is significant that V. Patel's warning was made a few months after the outbreak of communist armed rebellions throughout South East Asia. These armed rebellions followed the meeting of the representatives of the communist parties of Asia in February 1948 under the cover of the South Asian Youth Congress at Calcutta. In India itself, there were communist-led armed uprisings in Telengana and Andhra. It is also significant that the questions raised in Parliament came only three months after the complete victory of the communists in China, and of their arrival on the northern borders of Indochina, Thailand, Burma and India. V. Patel's statement and the questions raised by the Indian members of Parliament speak for themselves as to the preoccupations of many Indians at the time. They were shared by the Indian government also. ¹²⁹ And they could not but exert a strong influence on India's policy in South East Asia.

¹²⁸ *Par. Deb.*, 1950, voll. 1, part 1, March 13, p. 779.

¹²⁹ See Mr. Nehru's and Mr. Raja Gopalachari's statements along these lines. Chapter 5, p. 130, and chapter 6, pp. 180-81.