

Stories of the Indian descendants as revolutionaries in Vietnam

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the Indian descendants who are acknowledged in mainstream records as contributors to national and democratic revolutionaries. Relying on archival documents and ethnographic notes collected from the author's research at National Archival Centre II, the Archive Centre of Ho Chi Minh city People's Committee, and at the Indian temples and mosques in Ho Chi Minh city in the years from 2013 to 2014, this paper constructs narratives of the Indians' personal experience about Vietnamese revolutionaries. Rather than aiming at a comprehensive description of these Indian individuals with heroic details, this paper includes fragments of their life stories, which are diverse and temporary, as collected largely from the author's ethnographic research and sometimes from journalistic and administrative writings. The way of telling specific and particular experiences of the Indian descendants supporting Vietnamese nation-building is significant in bringing up vivid and particular portrayals of this population. That potentially forms lively, immediate indicators of historical and cultural connections between India and Vietnam.

Keywords: Indian descendants, supporters of Vietnamese national and class revolutions, Vietnamese nation building.

Classification numbers: 8.3, 9.2

1. Introduction

In official records of both Vietnam and India, Indians in Vietnam exclusively include those who have migrated to Vietnam as various bilateral commitments between the two countries since the early 1990s. Specifically, the Ministry of the Non-Resident Indians and Person of Indian Origin Division of the Ministry of External Affairs still characterizes the community of Indians in Vietnam as workers: they "enjoy reasonably good economic status", [1]. This definition highlights the role of young Indian businesspeople and professionals, who present an emerging India and its enterprise and energy [2]. Correspondingly, the term "Indian Community" in Vietnam, as revealed in the document titled "India - Vietnam Relations", refers to "the Indians living in Vietnam, primarily to promote trade and

business interactions". This community "is vibrant, law-abiding, well-educated and prosperous", including professionals working in Indian and multinational companies; and they retain strong family, cultural, and business ties with India" [1].

Such a way of identifying Indians in Vietnam does not count *historical* records and the *actual* presence of Indians who are the descendants of those who, since the second half of the nineteenth century, migrated from French-British India to Indochina - Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. These Indian descendants have been in Vietnam for generations and many of them have participated in the democratic and national revolutions of Vietnam. Some of them have Vietnamese citizenship while their identity card carries the note "Indian ethnicity". Some of the Indian descendants retain Indian citizenship. Many Indian descendants

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earn their living through impermanent and low-income jobs such as mobile selling, motorbike taxi, costume jewellery polishing and selling, and halal meat servicing. This paper focuses on the Indian descendants who are acknowledged in mainstream records as contributors to national and democratic revolutionaries. Relying on archival documents and ethnographic notes collected from the author's research at National Archival Centre II, the Archive Centre of Ho Chi Minh city People's Committee, and at the Indian temples and mosques in Ho Chi Minh city in the years from 2013 to 2014, this paper constructs narratives of the Indians' personal experience about Vietnamese revolutionaries. Rather than aiming at a comprehensive description of these Indian individuals with heroic details, this paper includes fragments of their life stories, diverse and temporary, collected largely from the author's ethnographic research and sometimes from journalistic and administrative writings [3]. The way of telling specific and particular experiences of the Indian descendants supporting Vietnamese nation-building is significant in bringing up vivid and particular portrayals of this population. This potentially forms lively, immediate indicators of historical and cultural connections between India and Vietnam.

2. Female wounded soldier

One of the fragments of the Indian descendants' life stories belongs to Mrs. Bibi. She is a wounded soldier, who is recognized by the Vietnamese government to be a supporter of the Vietnamese revolution and nation-building. At the time I first met her in the summer of 2013, she was 82 years old. In days around July 27 - the Martyr and Wounded Veteran Memorial Day of Vietnam - in 2014, I visited Mrs Bibi more often, observing the Vietnamese government's appreciation of revolutionary contributors like Mrs. Bibi. Staying alone in an old and tiny room of the impaired collective building at Le Thanh Tong street, Mrs Bibi tended to speak unstopably. As her habitus was apparently

constructed since the time being a state-recognized citizen, Mrs. Bibi constantly endeavoured to perform as an old ideal female veteran. She narrated that her father was a "Bombay silk businessman" in Hanoi and married a Vietnamese woman from Hai Duong, a province of northern Vietnam. Her mother died when she was two years old. Due to her father's business, she moved from area to area. Her father then married a "Bombay woman"¹. "It was boring to death imprisoned in a house as my father constantly did business afar for months. My stepmother was beautiful and nice, but she kept quiet all the time. It was very boring staying at home", Mrs. Bibi's face turned stagnated when she told me this detail. But she looked energized again when she recalled stories of what she called "revolutionist activities" (hoạt động cách mạng, Vietnamese).

She recited her "revolutionist activities" in the tone of a child who was curious about the outside world, different from the world of the house that her father forced her to stay in all the time while he had to travel afar for a long time frequently. For her, taking the "revolutionist activities" was also a chance for her to escape from classes. Her female teacher, whose husband was a high leader of the Party-led revolutionary movement in Saigon, asked her to bring letters and weapons hidden in baskets to her husband at a secret base. According to Bibi, it is her Western figure that helped to contribute to her easy completion of the revolutionary tasks that were assigned by her teacher. She could help secret cadres pass the security posts easily because no one could think that a western feminine girl could be involved in anti-French action. Bibi recalled that she was acquainted with a French official who treated her

¹The research author thinks this detail needs to be treated not as a historical fact but as a segment of her memory, which must be imaginative. In other words, the term "Bombay" occurs more as a form of Mrs. Bibi's fantasy about her so-called Indian origin than as a noun of precise geographical location as in administrative maps. The perception of separate countries "India" and "Pakistan" did not exist in India until 1947 with the Partition.

as though she was his daughter. Thanks to this close relationship, she could go to his house, freely take food and fruits, and it also made it easier for her to pass security checks even when she was secretly keeping confidential documents inside her belongings. She was a polyglot. She could communicate in French, Chinese, Thai and Cambodian. Later, she learned to even speak English.

It was her fun to run around the Saigon streets, slipping in tree and grass bushes and swimming in leech-filled damps to bring the basket to the secret soldiers. She kept freshly and happily smiling when she recalled memories of those days. Her father and her brothers could not recognize her when she came back home from school because her face and her body were covered with black mud and other strange substances that were often used at the time to confuse French securities. She adored her female teacher because she did not force her to study as her father expected; instead, she taught Bibi how to make a special cake inside which weapons could be kept. Mrs Bibi repeated her stories about her female teacher as the saviour of her lonely childhood. Her father was absent from home for his business with the supposition that the female teacher he chose for his daughter would teach her how to become a traditional Hanoian girl. He did not know how bored his daughter was at home with the stepmother who was always quiet. However, his absence was a good condition for her to freely enjoy “playful games” that were guided by her teacher - a secret communist at that time. She enjoyed the wild trees and damps of Ong Co Field where the secret base of communists was located. She enjoyed staying at her teacher’s house, lying on the cold ground although she had a luxury bed at home. Mrs. Bibi’s mouth opened widely and freshly recalled her naughty childhood with the entertainment of sneakily stealing her fathers’ clothes and food to give to people in the secret base.

One day in the year 1950, the young girl was wounded in a sudden attack by French soldiers at Ong Co Field. Her father brought her to France for

treatment which lasted a year, given that he did not know her involvement with the communist base located in the Field. He thought his daughter’s wound was an accident while she happened to play on the field. Although cured, Mrs. Bibi was permanently disabled forty-one percent.

Being granted the certificate of a wounded veteran, Mrs. Bibi’s involvement in the national revolutionary appears in numerous journalistic and literary depictions writings including *The People* newspaper, *Ho Chi Minh Committee of The Vietnamese Fatherland Front*, news *Liberating Saigon*, *Youth News*, and Ho Chi Minh Television [4-7]. They depict the young Bibi as an example of a young Vietnamese who plays the role of “the vanguard force” in nation-building and defence in different national struggles. The July 28, 2010 issues of *Liberating Saigon News* Highlights Grand Bibi’s sacrifices for the Vietnamese nation at her very young age:

At the age of thirteen, being far away from her father and staying with her adopted mother (the female teacher), she happily followed the Viet Minh [communist cadres]. Bibi followed her adopted mother in taking revolutionary activities in outlying areas of Gia Dinh city... Bibi instructed cadres on how to get in and out of Saigon - Gia Dinh. She supplied chemical substances, food, cloth, and many other goods for the revolution [5].

Vuong Liem is a high-profile socialist writer. He uses words such as “Viet Minh”, “revolutionary activities”, “cadres” and “revolution” to name Grand Bibi’s thoughts and activities. These details aim at constructing an image of Grand Bibi as an ideal citizen who supports the leading Party of Vietnam. In a more lyrical and emotional narration of her past, Dang Thi Tu, a high-rank female police officer in Ho Chi Minh city, also interprets Bibi’s unmarried status as her devotion to the Vietnamese national revolution. In Tu’s narration, the image of Grand Bibi completely conforms to familiar discourses of the Party about the history of the national struggle:

"I visited her one day at the first-floor apartment located at 277 Le Thanh Ton street, Ben Thanh ward, district 1, Ho Chi Minh city. She welcomed me happily. She smiled, revealing the wrinkled skin of a seventy-seven-year-old childless and husbandless woman. She committed her whole life to the revolution, the party, and the ideology of Ho Chi Minh (...) Answering my question on what she learned from Uncle (Ho Chi Minh), she said that she "learned humanity and sacrifice... He sacrificed his whole life for the freedom and liberty of the Nation and for the Happiness of the People. Following him, I abided by the Party. I give up parts of my blood and body for it without regrets. Completely absorbed with the revolution, my greenness passed by without notice" [8].

In a similar way to the way of Dang Thi Tu, Thanh Thuy highlights Grand Bibi's involvement in the Revolution in her publication in the August 31, 2010 issue of *News Column, The Communist Party of District 1* (Ho Chi Minh city Communist Party). As described in this article, Bibi has never thought of herself as a foreigner... Vietnamese blood flows strongly within her body... The [first Indochina] War happened. Her family drifted to the southern part of the land. Her happy childhood nearly stopped when her mother got sick and passed away; her father got married to another woman. However, it was fortunate for her that she had an adopted mother - her wonderful second mother. This woman taught her during her elementary school years and filled the motherless child's unfortunate fate with the grand love of an ideal mother. One thing that she was not expecting was that her adopted mother was an underground communist soldier. Due to her love for her adopted mother, she occasionally helped her bring food, letters, documents, and news to some cadres without knowing that she was gradually stepping into the revolutionary road [9]. Answering the author's question on why she became a communist revolutionary, she simply answered: "I love my mother, so I love the revolution".

As seen in documents of the 4th Congress, the Party continued encouraging Vietnamese authors to erect inspiring models of "loyal, resourceful and extremely brave mothers and women", who "side body and soul with the entire nation to fight the enemy and build a new life" [10]. The portrait of Mrs Bibi in official Vietnamese history is the portrait of the brave youth who sacrificed lives for the national struggle of Vietnam.

3. Martyr, secret agent, and political prisoner

Velousamy, often called Big Bi, is a nationally recognized revolutionary martyr. On the wall, above the only window of the Indian temple Subramaniam Swamy located at Nam Ky Khoi Nghia street (Ho Chi Minh city), hangs a rectangle glass frame that keeps a certificate inside. It is the National Acknowledgement of Your Contribution, which is normally granted to citizens who died for the national cause. The name that occurs in the certificate, as written, is "Nguyen To Lien (Velou Sa My)". The following notes in the certificate include more details about this martyr: He is a member of a suicide team. He lived in the Duc Nghia ward, Phan Thiet district, Binh Thuan province. He was acknowledged "for being sacrificing his life in the anti-colonial French resistance on May 1, 1945". The certificate was signed by Prime Minister Phan Van Khai on January 29, 2007, which was fifty-seven years after his sacrifice.

Velousamy was born to the family of an Indian man with English citizenship and two Vietnamese wives - two blood sisters. His father, named V.R.M Ramassamy, was usually addressed by local people "Cha Chop" because he looked like an Indian person and he usually had an appointed peak leather hat. He settled in Phan Thiet province, Southern Vietnam, in 1926. Members of his family worked as tax collectors in Phan Thiet's markets and ran the business of curry foods at the house 26 Le Van Duyet (present-day 26-28 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Da Kao ward, district 1, Ho Chi Minh city). His son, Velousamy, had English citizenship and was

knowledgeable of French. He was hired to work as a waiter at the pub *Chez les Manchots* managed by a French military official. Then, revolutionary cadres recruited him to exploit news from French officials and soldiers, who came to the pub frequently. Velousamy, called by a Vietnamese comrade as Big Bi, was killed by pro-French Vietnamese soldiers when a photo of him taken with a member of the Suicide Team was found in an attacked revolutionary base [11].

The July 13, 2007 issue of *Tien Phong* revealed that Big Bi's family permitted the Viet Minh officials to dig a secret vault in their house in Phan Thiet province. His aunties took turns guarding and cooking for Viet Minh soldiers. These twin sisters self-assigned their responsibility of throwing unwanted soil and dirt in a cellar near Ca Ty river, helping the soldiers to complete the secret tunnel [11]. Volume 213, March 1994, of *Phan Thiet News* published a reflection about Big Bi; the author of this reflection is Tran Ngoc Trac, the former president of former Thuan Hai province and the former ideological supervisor of Big Bi. The reflection is full of ideological terms, which impressed the audience with Big Bi's loyalty to the Vietnamese nation:

Big Bi was enlightened by the communist revolution early. He was admitted to the Team of Teenage Suicide Communists... He was an intellectual youth who was passionate about books, letters, and arts performances, and was knowledgeable of English and French; he had revolutionary enthusiasms and impetuous patriotisms in the blood of his body [11].

Big Bi's attachment to the Vietnamese nation such is expressed with emotionally strong words as "revolution enlightenment", "patriotism", "impetuous", and "enthusiasm". As a consequence, the Indian descendant incurs a model of "brave Vietnamese young persons" who sacrificed their lives for the nation's cause.

Another Indian descendant who performs his loyalty to Vietnam is Cao Van Tay (Moritam). He

was the only Indian descendant who received a Vietnamese citizenship decree that was signed by President Ho Chi Minh and who held many high governmental positions in Vietnam [12]. In the National Archive Centre 3, there was a file including ten documents related to the application for Vietnamese citizenship of Cao Van Tay. The documents have dates of issuing starting from February to June 1959. Unfortunately, these documents have not yet been deconfidentialized, which means they were not yet open for public access. The only information about this character was the decree by President Ho Chi Minh issued in December 1959 and the surface information gathered from the title of the unpublished file. Other small bits of information about this person are from the archive of Binh Duong Province.

In the book *History of The Commando Force in Saigon From 1954 to 1977* (2013), Cao Van Tay is noted as 1 out of 58 intelligent official-leaders in Saigon: "Cao Van Tay (Ba Coc) - Leader of Special Work Agency (work of intelligence and espionage, 1948)" [13]. In the archived document, mentioned above, the list of those "going to B battle site" stored at the National Archive Centre 3, was born in 1925 in My Phuoc district, Thu Dau Mot province [14]. In the personal record, also archived in this Centre, filled on April 10, 1959, for the question about family background, he responded "poor class in the city". His father used to work as a security guard and worker for some companies and his mother was a wandering seller. This document also includes details that Cao Van Tay suffered in "imperial prisons"; he was persistent when he did not surrender enemies even in the context of being imprisoned. His political view - communist alliance - was "consistent", as described.

Cao Van Tay had worked on the side of the Vietnamese communists since he was a teenager in the early years of post-revolution. Under the alias, he was one of the founders of groups of secret agents

advocating for communism in South Vietnam in the 1940s. He led the intelligence agency of Saigon - Cho Lon formed in 1946 in response to the ambition of the French to set up southern Vietnam as its autonomous region, separating it from the northern region. The agency had the first name "Special Work Agency" and later the Information Agency to avoid being watched by the French. As an intelligence agent of the Communist-led Secret Task Agency in southern Vietnam, Moritam travelled and visited agricultural institutions throughout India and Burma from 1948 to 1953, searching for some special fungus that could destroy entire rubber tree fields of French colonizers in the region. With knowledge of Khmer, Chinese, Russian, English, and French languages, he could complete his tasks in the international milieu. When going to the B battle in North Vietnam during the war, Cao Van Tay worked as a governmental specialist of Asian relations in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Hanoi. North Vietnam government distributed him a house at Ly Nam De street, famous for being the residence place of military officials and high-ranking governmental officials. When he returned to Saigon in 1975, he continued holding important positions in charge of ethnic minority issues.

Another Indian descendant who was involved in the Vietnamese revolution that is recorded in Vietnamese history is Nam Ha. He acted as an underground intelligence of North Vietnam working and living in Saigon². His Indian identity helped him get through many security checks while he was active in Saigon. He was a "political prisoner" imprisoned in "imperialist prisoners". He was listed in the book that lists political prisoners living in district 10 [13]. He was captured in 1966 by Republic Government police and sentenced to 15 years in jail. He suffered severe torture at the General Police Station in Saigon

²No document about his Indian name and Indian background was found. Information about his background was provided by his close friend, a famous historian and translator of Vietnam. Details of this informant was omitted intentionally by the paper's author.

and the Prison Con Son until he was released in 1971. After 1975, while all of his relatives fled to France, Nam Ha worked for the Vietnamese government, particularly the Department of Personnel of district 10 until he retired.

4. Supporters of the contemporary Vietnamese government

This part of the paper focuses on the individual Indian descendants who formed as strong supporters of the recent Vietnamese government in its effort for national hegemony and socialist goals. The first case is a family of Muslim Indian descent living in Ho Chi Minh city. These descendants, at the time of research in 2013-2014, were in charge of managing an Indian mosque in this city. As told by Zen, a member of this family, his maternal grandfather was a "pure Indian". He came to Vietnam to do textile business with his older brothers. Later on, he changed to the job of dispatching and processing goats for meat. At that time, he married a Vietnamese girl. Zen also mentioned that his paternal grandmother was also a "pure Indian." He worked as a helper in a French family. She followed this French family to Vietnam, met and married a Pakistani. Zen is the third generation of his racially mixed family.

Noticeably, members of this family of Indian descent actively participated in Party-led functions and organizations. Jaytune, the youngest sister of Zen, was born in 1985 and is a member of the Fatherland Front. She particularly advocated for ethnic minority ties. As told by Jaytune, she often took part in trips organized by the Fatherland Front to other provinces to promote the ethnic unification of Vietnam. She said that this monthly program was to ensure the participation of representatives of every ethnic group in Ho Chi Minh city in functions of cultural exchanges. At her home, above the table on the right side of the room where the Jaytune family usually invites their guests for tea, there are photos of her in traditional Muslim dress. In this photo, she was bowing her head down and shaking the hands of a national president.

Jaytune's father and brother, who were in charge of the Indian mosque, also performed as supporters of the Vietnamese government. At the centre of the administrative office of the mosque, there are photos in which her father and brother are shaking hands with the president in one voting day. The photos were placed on the top of the glass cupboard that was hanging on the wall. They are at a position opposite to entering the door so that people can see them immediately when they step into the room. The photos do not have any notes indicating the time and space of the event. The only existing note reveals that the photos were taken when the president met with the representative of voters in the district. Five other photos were of the meeting of the mosque members with some politicians from India. These politically meaningful photos were treated solemnly: they were encased in a gilded frame of 20x30 cm and covered by glass. They were placed prominently and easy for public eyes to access. They were all hung on top and outside the glass cupboard. In one section of the cupboard, revolutionary books occupy the centre position. At the corner of the section is a book about Ho Chi Minh, entitled *Ho Chi Minh*, a national liberation hero and world cultural celebrity. Next to it on the right is *Heroes living forever at the age of 20, talking revolutionary heroes of Vietnam*. On the left a book about the anti-American resistance war of Southerners, entitled *The South*, 21 years of resistance against the US. In these books are photos of Ho Chi Minh and revolutionary soldiers. Lying at the bottom of the sections were two other books about the histories of the Communist Party and Ho Chi Minh. These Indian descendants also demonstrate their allegiance with the main political ideology and the mainstream histories of the Vietnamese state by way of showing their concern over the Parcel Island issues. These Indian descendants display in the mirror cupboard many mainstream publications and souvenir items that highlight the island's belonging to Vietnamese land historically.

The second case is Mr Ba, in charge of Sri Thenday Yutthapani Temple. Mr Ba's father was a "pure Indian" born to a rich Indian family who settled in the area presently called Tan Binh district of Ho Chi Minh city. They had moved to Saigon when Mr Ba was 7 years old. They once had a farm of cows in Dong Nai province. When they moved to Saigon, their property grew to include the entire road, presently called Truong Minh Giang (district 1). They constructed a number of houses for release³. Mrs Tuyet, his sister, recalled that she used to follow her grandmother as she went to every house on that street to collect rental fees at the end of each month. In Tuyet's memory, her mother did not have a good relationship with her parents-in-law. The marriage of her parents was not permitted by her Indian grandparents because her mother came from a poor Vietnamese family. When Mr Ba was only three months old, the Indian grandparents took him to their family to take care of him, ignoring her mother's begging to keep the child. They wanted to make sure that their grandson did not become influenced by the culture and knowledge of the so-called low Vietnamese class. They proposed a so-called western education to him. Every day, in their own car, they drove him to western schools to study English. Under the South Vietnam government, his father worked for the Vinatexco and Vinafilco factory, established in 1959 by a large shareholder named Ly Long Thanh, a Chinese businessman. Twice a week, her father was asked to come to his parent's house to teach Mr Ba French. Her mother, in her early time of being the daughter-in-law of this powerful Indian family, had to learn how to make spicy cakes and curry bean meals every Sunday morning. In Tuyet's memory of her mother's narration, her grandfather was the one who took the responsibility to teach all the daughters-in-law about Indian foods. Every day, he worked from 7 am to 4 pm. Back to his house by 4:15 pm, her father took two cans of water from the

³Informal interview with his son, August 8, 2013.

village dwelling. One can be placed in the bathroom for his wife and children to bathe. The other one was stored to wash the family's belongings. According to her, her Indian father was the nicest man.

Under the management of Mr Ba, Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple is more engaged with national projects. Before 1975, Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple was a place exclusively of these rich, powerful Indians⁴ who were members of Association of Overseas Indians. Commoners were strictly kept away from the temple. As a memory from Grand Sam, one Indian descendant, he did not dare to go to Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple. Her husband, a Vietnamese historian, recalled that two policemen always stood at two sides of the temple gate. They looked threatening and would stop any Vietnamese and other tattered people from going close to the temple. The retired old man, living nearby in the Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple, recalled in his childhood time long rows of luxurious houses opposite the temple on Ton That Thiep street, which used to be places of small banks of Indians. He showed me the unchanging white houses where rich Indian families once stayed. He pointed me to the white corridors, white curtains, and small milky-coloured windows saying that they were typical of Indian houses in his time. He particularly remembered that Indians set up desks on the pavements opposite to the temple. His uncle went to borrow money from the Indians several times. Whenever there were money borrowers, the Indian quickly ran into the temple and went out with some amount of money. Nevertheless, with the democratic revolution after 1975, the Indians' control of this temple ended. Mr Ba's father and Mr Ba, with their Indian background, were assigned to be in charge of managing the

temple. Mr Ba made an effort to make the temple a significant contributor to national projects that aimed at clearing hunger, alleviating poverty, taking care of wounded soldiers, and performing gratitude for revolutionary martyrs. At every homeless-soul day (July 15 according to the lunar calendar), his pagoda distributed rice and soya bean to poor people and took care of old people. In a proud voice, he talked about his latest donation to the community, which is the successful construction of a house of gratitude in Can Gio district. The temple also provides scholarships for poor students with high achievement in studying. Mr Ba explicitly and proudly shared his function in the temple as the bridge connecting the state and believers. As a member of the Fatherland Front, he was able to convey his believer's state policies. Around the table where Mr Ba sits, there are certificates acknowledging his contributions to national projects. There are also frames of his merits for his excellent participation to support his district community.

Mr Ba's alliance with national projects is also seen in his language use. He constantly transplanted nationalist statements into his conversations with me. Mr Ba's conversations are filled with vocabulary and terms often appearing in officials' meetings. His conversations are filled with mainstream political vocabularies such as governmental levels and brotherhood and collective group. He constantly identified himself as part of the Vietnamese nation although he is still carrying an Indian passport. "Although I brought my passport of India when I was 15 years old, I lived in this country; I followed Vietnamese laws and traditions. Therefore, this is my hometown". For this man, it is his great love for this country that he is in charge of the temple Loving for the country was performed as the supreme truth. This man presented himself as a loyal citizen of Vietnam. More than that, he behaved not as a Vietnamese citizen, but also with Vietnamese ethnicity with the use of the word "my hometown". For him, although

⁴There is no record saying that Subramaniam Swamy temple used to be headquarters of Indians' trading activities. Nevertheless, records about the two other Hindu temples, Marimman and Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple, were not only religious centers but also headquarters of money-lending and commercial activities of groups of Indians before 1975 [15].

he holds an Indian passport, his intimacy and his passion fall into Vietnam⁵.

In conforming to the government's policy of promoting the India - Vietnam relationship, Mr Ba also attempts to function as an authentic Indian guru of the temple. In the early 1980s, the government revitalized the Indian temples to serve the religious practices of coming Indian expats. Ho Chi Minh city Television 2002 made a film documentary about three Indian temples in Ho Chi Minh city. In the DVD version of the film, provided by Mr Ba, the narrative concludes with the necessity for the state to govern these temples to ensure their function as religious centres of current Indian expats: "The heritages like this one do not only stamp a national history of old Saigon but also function as a worshipping place for Indians in present-day Ho Chi Minh city" [7]. For specific Sri Thenday Yutthapani, Ho Chi Minh city's People Committee issued decision number 99/QD-UB in 1976, making it a memory house of the Vietnamese - Indian relationship and a museum of artifacts that indicate cultural and artistic ties between the two nations as well as a place for Indians to visit and worship on the occasion of festivals. Mr Ba acted as a respected Indian intellectual as he could speak both English and French. According to him, he could read the classic Indian language. He wore an Indian dress when he prayed. His appearance was typical Indian according to the Vietnamese imagination. He wore a walrus moustache curling down to his under his chin and had curly black hair. He looks serious and is mostly quiet. Mr Ba continuously reconstructed and decorated the temple with the most authentic Indian figures, according to his knowledge. He asked his son, who had businesses with Indian companies, to buy Indian photos, statues, and building materials from India for the temple. There are a number of large photos of famous Indian figures, including R. Tagore, hanging on the walls of the temple. If asked when these photos were placed there, Mr Ba

would answer it was hundreds of years ago, even unmemorable. This way of blurring time must aim at constructing an Indian authenticity of this temple. In the documentary film, produced by Ho Chi Minh city Television in 2002 about three temples in Ho Chi Minh, Mr Ba and his family members attempt to seriously perform Indian rituals. In the scene about Sri Thenday Yutthapani temple, there are both overseas Indians, who were new Indian migrants and Indian descendants. They attend a ritual function led by Mr Ba. The overseas Indian performs the ritual of receiving God's gift that is handed down by Mr Ba. The camera lens focuses on the moment when Mr Ba gives him a plastic bag of an apple and a candle stick. The other person who is recorded closely was an Indian woman, who dresses nobly and wears a costly wallet. She also receives sacred water from Mr Ba. She applies the water to her hair and drinks the remaining. All relatives of Mr Ba were dressed neatly, quietly standing and observing the ritual. Mr Ba's cousin, a twenty-two-year-old man, carefully watches the hand moves of another overseas Indian man when he receives the holy water. His eyes moved up and down, right, and left following the Indian man's gesture of receiving and treating the holy water granted by his uncle. Beside her son, Mrs Tuyet, looked anxious, observing the ritual quietly. She seems not to dare to move and is too weak to breathe, fearing to break the solemnity of the ritual. It is apparent that although these Indian descendants might not master the so-called authentic Indian ritual, they make much effort of following it and making it to serve the religious beliefs of the overseas. Doing so, they contribute to developing the relationship between the two nations.

5. Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, this paper does not aim to provide comprehensive portrayals of the Indian descendants who have actively participated in the political, social, and cultural lives of the Indians in Vietnam. Instead, it includes fragments of stories of these individual Indian descendants that are

⁵An informal interview on July 25, 2014.

temporally and spatially specific and particular. It focuses on their personal experience about and with national projects, and how they lived within them and in them. Such a way of identifying Indian descendants provides a more dynamic indicator of connections between Vietnam and India. This is particularly the case, given that most scholarship about connections between the two nations focuses on cultural aspects that largely demonstrate the spread of Indian culture over Vietnam among other Asian lands [16-19]. The stories of the individual Indian descendants in Vietnam provoke a new way of addressing historical links and interactions between Vietnam that include diverse groups of Indians in Vietnam, and counts on various sources of written and orally transmitted accounts as well as of ethnographic research.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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