

10th – The Nationalist Movement in Indo China II



Declaration of Independence: The declaration of the new republic was based on the principles of the declaration of independence of the United States in 1771 and the French Revolution in 1791. This declaration pronounced that the French have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity or equality, justice and liberty which was the slogan of French Revolution. They followed imperialist ideals and practiced obscurantism against the people of Vietnam. So the declaration said, “We solemnly proclaim to the entire world. Vietnam has the right to be free and independent and in fact has become free and independent”.

The New Republic of Vietnam: The French were unwilling to grant independence to their colonial subjects and in 1946 war broke out. The Supreme French Commander, General Henry Navarre declared in 1953 that they would be victorious. But after 8 years of battle, the French were defeated in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. The entire commanding staff, including a general, 16 colonels and 1,749 officers were taken as prisoners.

After Defeat of France: Division of Vietnam: In the peace negotiations in Geneva that followed the French defeat, the Vietnamese were persuaded to accept the division of the country. North and South Vietnam were split. Ho Chi Minh and Communists took power in North Vietnam while Bao Dai's regime was put in power in South.

Ho Chi Minh: Ho Chi Minh had a chance to meet Russian leaders including Lenin. After spending about 30 years abroad in America, Europe, China and Thailand, Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam in May, 1941. Ho Chi Minh studied in French school which produced great leaders like Ngo Dinh Diem, Vo Nguyen Giap and Phan Van Dong. When Japan occupied Vietnam in 1941, he resumed contact with Indo-Chinese Communist Party leaders and helped to find a new communist dominated independent movement, popularly known as Vietminh that fought the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh officially stepped down from power in 1955, due to ill health, but remained the inspirational figure for Vietnamese for a United Communist Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh died on 3rd September, 1969.

Vietnam became Battlefield: After the division, Vietnam turned into battlefield bringing death and destruction to its people as well as the environment.

The Bao Dai's regime was soon overthrown by Ngo Dinh Diem, who built a repressive and authoritarian government. Anyone who opposed him was called Communist and was jailed and killed. Diem retained Ordinance 10. It was a French law that permitted Christianity, but outlawed Buddhism. Diem's, dictatorial rule came to be opposed by National Liberation Front (NLF).

The Entry of the US into the War: With the help of Ho Chi Minh Government in the North, the NLF fought for the unification of the country. The US worried as Communists gaining power due to this alliance, so it decided to interfere strictly, sending in troops and arms.

Cause of American-Vietnam War: The Vietnam War grew out of a fear among the US policy-planners that the victory of the Ho Chi Minh Government would start a domino effect, i.e. Communist Government would be established in other countries. American policy-makers underestimated the power of nationalism, which could inspire the people of a small country to fight the most technologically advanced country in the world. The US entry into the war marked a new phase that proved too costly to the Vietnamese as well as to the Americans. This war was



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fought between North Vietnam, supported by its Communist allies and Government of South Vietnam, supported by the United States, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, etc.

Colonial War: The North Vietnamese Government and Viet-Cong viewed the conflict as a Colonial War. It fought initially against France, backed by the US and later against South Vietnam, which was a US puppet state.

The US combat units were deployed in 1965 beginning. Operations spanned international borders with Laos, Cambodia which were heavily bombed. American involvement in the war peaked in 1968. In spite of its advanced technology and good medical supplies, the US casualties were high.

The End of War: The phase of struggle with US was brutal as it widely used chemical weapons Napalm, Agent orange and phosphorous bombs. Besides soldiers a large number of civilians died in this war. Despite an international outcry, chemical weapons were used in the Vietnam War by the US media and films played a major role in both supporting as well as criticising the Hollywood made film in support of the war, such as John Wayne's Green Berets (1968). Some films tried to understand the reasons for this war. Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979) suggested the moral confusion faced by the US.

The US military involvement ended on 15th August, 1973, as a result of the Case-Church amendment passed by the US Congress which prohibited further US military activity in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia unless the President secured congressional approval in advance. The capture of Saigon by the Vietnam People's Army in April 1975, marked end of the war. The North and South Vietnam were reunified in 1976.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail: Vietnamese had to carry out a long struggle for independence – first against France, then against Japan and lastly against USA. The Ho Chi Minh trail symbolises how the Vietnamese used their limited resources to advantages. This trail was an immense network of footpaths and roads and was used to transport men and materials from the North to South Vietnam. The trail had support of the bases and hospitals. The Vietnamese porters, which were mainly women, deserve all praises for their great -sacrifice in carrying 25 kilos weight on their backs or about 70 kilos on their bicycles. Most of the trail was outside Vietnam in neighboring countries like Laos and Cambodia with branch lines extending into South Vietnam. The US regularly bombed this trail trying to disrupt supplies. If any line to trail was broken, it was repaired immediately and the supply line maintained as ever.

The nation and its heroes: The roles of the women and its heroes were specified in the anti-imperialist movement in Vietnam.

Women as Rebels: Women in Vietnam enjoyed greater equality than in China, especially among the lower classes. As the Nationalist Movement grew, the status of women was questioned and a new image of womanhood emerged. Writers and political thinkers began idealising women who rebelled against social norms. In the 1930s, a famous novel by Nhat Linh caused a scandal because it showed a woman leaving a forced marriage and marrying someone of her choice, involved in nationalist politics. This rebellion against social conventions marked the arrival of the new woman in Vietnamese society.

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Heroes of Past Times: Writers like Nhat Linh, Phan Boi Chau portrayed women as patriots, who fought against Chinese domination. Phan Boi Chau wrote a play based on the lives of the Trung sisters who had fought against Chinese domination in 39-43 CE. After Phan's play, the Trung sisters came to be idealised and glorified. Woman rebel like Trieu Au, who lived in the third century CE, was a part of the popular nationalist lore. She was orphaned in childhood and lived with her brother. On growing up she left home and went into jungles, organised a large army and resisted Chinese rule. She became a sacred figure who was popularised by the nationalists to inspire people.

Women as Warriors: In 1960s, women were portrayed as young, brave and dedicated. They were represented not only as warriors, but also as workers. They worked as porters and carried 25 kg of food or war material on their back and 70 kg on their bicycles. Women whether young or old began to work and fight for the country. Many women joined the movement; they nursed the wounded, constructed underground rooms and tunnels to save their army. Along Ho Chi Minh trail, young volunteers kept open 2,915 km of strategic roads and guarded 2,500 key points. They built six airstrips, neutralised tens of thousands of bombs, transported tens of thousands of kilograms of cargo, weapons and food and shot down fifteen planes.

Between 1965 and 1975, of the 17,000 youth who worked on the trail about 70% to 80% were the women. One military historian suggested that there were 1.5 million women in the regular army, the militia, the local forces and professional teams.

Women in Times of Peace: As the peace talk began in the 1970s, the image of women transformed as workers in agricultural cooperatives, factorise and production units. They were no longer represented as warriors; they became 'workers'.

The end of the war: The prolongation of the war created strong reactions even within the US. It was clear that the US had failed to achieve its main objectives i.e. the Vietnamese resistance had not been crushed, the support of the Vietnamese people for the US action had not been won. This war was known as the First Television War. Battle scenes were shown on the daily news programmes.

Writers such as Mary McCarthy and actors like Jane Fonda even visited North Vietnam and praised their heroic defence of the countries. The renowned scholar Noam Chomsky called the war, "the greatest threat to peace to national self-determination and to international cooperation". The widespread opposition of government policy forced to negotiate an end of the war. A peace settlement was signed in Paris in January 1974, ending conflict with US.

But fighting between the Saigon regime and the NLF continued. The NLF occupied the presidential palace in Saigon on 31st April, 1975. On 2nd July, 1976, North and South Vietnam were merged to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Timeline: Important Events

Nguyen Anh became emperor, symbolising the unification of the country under the Nguyen dynasty

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| 1858 | French troops landed in Vietnam |
| 1867 | Cochinchina (the South) became a French Colony. |
| 1873 | Francis Gamier was commissioned by the French to try and establish a French colony in Tonkin. |



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- 1887 Creation of the Indo-China Union, including CochinChina, Anaam, Tonkin, Cambodia and later Laos.
- 1903 The modern part of Hanoi was struck by bubonic plague.
- 1907 The Tonkin Free School was started to provide a Western style education.
- 1911, Monarchy in China was overthrown by a popular movement led by Sun Yat-Sen and a Republic was formed.
- 1930 Ho Chi Minh formed the Vietnamese Communist Party.
- 1940 Japan occupied Vietnam as part of its imperial drive to control South-East Asia.
- 1945 Vietminh started a general popular insurrection. Bao Dai abdicated. Ho Chi Minh declared independence in Hanoi (23rd September). The Democratic Republic of Vietnam was formed and Ho Chi Minh became the Chairman.
- 1954 The French Army was defeated at Dien Bien Phu.
- 1961 Kennedy decided to increase the US military aid to South Vietnam.
- 1974 Paris Peace Treaty.
- 1975 The NLF troops entered Saigon, occupied presidential palace and unified Vietnam.
- 1976 The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was Proclaimed.

