

FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE ASIAN RELATIONS CONFERENCE

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Fifty Years after the Asian Relations Conference

The historic first Asian Relations Conference, held during 23 March - 2 April 1947 in Delhi, was a big event of the time. In fact, due to many reasons the Conference became greater and more important than its organisers originally expected. The dramatic developments in the Indian political situation resulting in the formation of the National Interim Government with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister was the most important reason. Although several international factors such as the freedom movements in Indonesia, Indo-China and Burma and increasing strategic importance of the Central Asia and the Middle East had also created a world-wide interest in this unique first gathering of all the Asian countries, in some quarters of Great Britain, United States of America and France this interest was also mingled with a suspicion that the Conference might result in a threat to the political hegemony of Europe and America over Asia.

Today it is difficult to find out who first gave the idea of the Conference, that the Asians should meet and confer together. From the record of Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) it appears that in a special interview on 25 December 1945 to Mr. B. Shiva Rao, then a correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Hindu*, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru explained how an Asian Conference could be helpful to the understanding of Asian peoples. In the later half of March 1946 Pt Nehru made a hurricane tour of South East Asia. On his way back to India he made a forced landing in Rangoon where he met Gen. Aung San. It was then reported that the two leaders discussed the question of holding an

Asian Conference. Soon after his return the idea began to crystallise and it occurred to some members of the ICWA that the Council might take the initiative and provide the opportunity to the Asians for a discussion of their common problems.

The idea having been accepted, an informal meeting of those interested was called towards the end of April 1946 to discuss the general lines on which the conference should be organised. From the first it was agreed that the conference was to be an unofficial and basically a cultural event and that its main object would be to exchange ideas regarding the common problems which all Asian countries had to face in the post-war era and to study them in Round Table groups on the basis of data-papers prepared in advance by those who had made a special study of them. Finally on Pt Nehru's initiative the Executive Committee of the ICWA on 21 May 1946 decided to organise the conference, though it took the decision with great hesitation. For the Council was just young, having been formed only some three years before in 1943. It is true that during this period it had gathered together some six hundred members and its journal *India Quarterly* had already some important publications to its credit. It had also made contacts with some international bodies such as the Institute of Pacific Relations to whose conference at Hot Springs in 1945 it had sent a delegation of five members.

However, the preparations could not begin immediately due to the fluid and perplexing political situation in India arising after publication of the Cabinet Mission plan. It forced the Council to suspend active preparations which began only on 31 August 1946, when an Organising Committee consisting

of distinguished men and women from every walk of life was set up. Prominent among them were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (the President of the Organising Committee), Sarvapalli Dr Radhakrishnan, Shrimati Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Shri Asaf Ali, Sardar Baldeo Singh, Sir Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, Shri Ghanshyamdas Birla, Shrimati Hanna Sen, Shrimati Hansa Mehta, Shrimati Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, Shrimati Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Dr Zakir Hussain and Dr I.H. Qureshi. When the Interim Government of India was formed a few days after, in September 1946, it was not considered desirable that the Premier of the Indian Government should be the President of the Organising Committee and Shrimati Sarojini Naidu was elected in his place though Pt Nehru's active interest in the Conference continued unabated and without his inspiration and support the success of the conference would not have been possible.

The initial Agenda for the Conference had included: (i) Defence and Security questions; (ii) Racial problems; (iii) Intra-Asian emigration and the status and treatment of immigrants; (iv) Transition from a colonial to a national economy; (v) Agricultural and Industrial development; (vi) Public health, nutrition and labour welfare; and (vii) cultural co-operation. There was a practical unanimity on the relevance of all subjects except the first one. At the time large groups of racially different (from the majority population) people were living in many Asian countries. For instance the Chinese in then Malaya and Indo-China and Indians in Burma and then Ceylon. It naturally raised racial and migration problems which had to be tackled on an all-Asian basis if they were to be solved satisfactorily. The general backwardness of all Asian countries arising primarily

from the fact that they had yet to develop their national economies in accordance with their needs and resources and the resultant poverty and economic insecurity were among the most important matters for consideration at the first Asian Conference.

But, as regards the defence and security question, it was argued that while they were undoubtedly important, they raised controversial political issues which had better be avoided at this very first Conference. Moreover, a thorough examination of the question also revealed that the security of Asia had more than an Asian incidence as it was almost identical with world security. The view prevailed that in an Asian Relations Conference they should avoid on the one hand controversial issues relating to particular states and, on the other, issues which have more than an Asian incidence and can be solved only at global levels. As a result the first subject was omitted from the list and in its stead, a comparative study of Freedom Movements in Asian countries was included. An additional subject was also included: the status of women and women's movements in Asia. The eight subjects finally selected now fell under five groups: (a) National movements for freedom, (b) Migration and Racial problems, (c) Economic Development and Social services, (d) Cultural problems and (e) Women's problems. Each one of these was to be dealt with in the Conference by one Round Table Group at one or more sessions.

The second most important matter at the preparatory phase involved the question of invitees. This included two points: which countries were to be invited, and who were to be invited from each country? On the first point, there was a view which held that the Conference might be confined to South East Asia; the countries in this part of Asia do form a

region from the defence and economic points of view and are more closely allied to India than the others. Moreover, it was said, that as this was the first Conference to be attempted, it was better to proceed with caution and tackle a smaller task; and later, with the experience gained, it would be easier to spread out further. In the end, however, it was decided to send invitations to all Asian countries (and to Egypt which so closely resembled the Middle East countries in culture and general economic-political development) on the ground that this would have a more profound effect. In addition invitations were also sent to cultural institutions in certain non-Asian countries which included Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union.



Pandit Nehru entertains foreign delegates to the Asian Relations Conference. Lady Mountbatten, Shrimati Vijaylaxmi Pandit and Mrs. Indira Gandhi are seen among other dignitaries. (28 March 1947)

The second part of the question was also important, and called for some serious thinking on the part of the organisers. In the choice of delegates it was important to have different points of view represented at the Conference. For instance,

to have both the Jew as well as the Arab points of view from Palestine and the Kuomintang as well as the Communist delegates from China in the Conference. As a result final invitations were dispatched to request:

- (a) a joint delegation of sixteen from cultural associations and institutions in each Asian country and Egypt. The criterion of a cultural body being applied with some degree of flexibility so as to take into account the differing circumstances in the various countries;
- (b) individual scholars to supplement the representation from public associations; and
- (c) four observers from the Government of each Asian country.

The status of observers was also to be given to the representatives from institutions of the five non-Asian countries mentioned above.

All these decisions were taken by the Executive Committee of the Council in its meeting held on 31 August 1946. At this meeting was also appointed a representative and influential Organising Committee¹ of some 57 members with Pandit Nehru as Chairman² and a smaller Working Committee³ from among them to take the necessary steps in regard to the organisation of the Conference.

¹ 12 members were added to the list later.

² When Pandit Nehru assumed office in the interim Government in September 1946, the Working Committee elected Mrs. Sarojini Naidu as Chairman of the Organising Committee. Pandit Nehru continued, however, to be its Honorary President.

³ The Working Committee consisted of the following:

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (Chairman)
 Mrs. Hannah Sen Mr. K. Santhanam Dr. P.S. Lokanathan Mr. B. Shiva Rao
 Mr. D.G. Mulherkar Dr. Zakir Hussain Dr. I.H. Qureshi
 Dr. A. Appadorai (Secretary)
 The following were later co-opted to the Working Committee:
 Sir S.S. Bhatnagar Dr. P.R. Pilla Mrs. Hansa Mehta
 Mr. K.L. Punjabi Pandit H.N. Kunzru Sheikh Hashmatullah Koreshi
 Mr. M.R. Massani Mrs. K. Shiva Rao

Later the Conference preparations began to unfold itself more clearly. Again important additions were made. The Organising Committee established a Women's section of the Conference and efforts were made to have as large an attendance of women delegates and observers as was possible. Secondly an inter-Asian Art Exhibition, a Science Exhibition and an Archaeological Exhibition were also decided to be arranged; and thirdly in view of the fact that the idea of the Conference had evoked great enthusiasm throughout the country, arrangements were made to have two or three plenary sessions of the Conference (in addition to the Round Table Groups and Group Plenary Sessions) to which the wider public could be admitted on purchase of tickets. These decisions necessitated the expansion of the organisation and sub-committees were appointed to be in charge of the Women's section, Reception, Accommodation, Entertainment, Local visits, Exhibition, Pandal, Volunteers, Publicity, Memoranda and Finance.

The first invitations were sent early in September 1946. It took some time before they reached the invitees and the replies could come. This was due to the general difficulty of communication in the Asian countries. Later in his inaugural address Pandit Nehru drew pointed attention to the isolation of Asian countries from one another ever since the European domination of Asia. From early December, however, the replies began gradually to come in and by the first week of March practically all the invited countries had sent the ICWA their acceptance. The following was the final number of actual participants in the Conference :

COUNTRY	DELEGATES	OBSERVERS	TOTAL
Afghanistan	5	2	7
Armenia	2	...	2
Azerbaijan	2	...	2
Bhutan	...	2	2
Burma	17	4	21
Cambodia, Cochin-China			
Laos	3	...	3
Ceylon	15	5	20
China	8	1	9
Egypt	3	2	5
Georgia	2	...	2
India	51	6	57
Indonesia	25	7	32
Iran	3	3	6
Kazakhstan	2	...	2
Kirghizia	1	...	1
Korea	3	...	3

Malaya	14	...	14
Mongolia	2	1	3
Nepal	5	3	8
Hebrew University, Palestine	10	...	10
Philippines	6	...	6
Siam	2	2	4
Tibet	4	...	4
Turkey	...	1	1
Turkmenistan	1	...	1
Uzbekistan	2	...	2
Vietnam	3	...	3
Australia	...	2	2
Arab League	...	1	1
Great Britain	...	3	3
Soviet Union	...	2	2
U S A	...	3	3
U N O	...	1	1
	<hr/>		
	191	51	242

After receiving a fair number of acceptances, the Working Committee decided the dates for the Conference. This was to be 23 March - 2 April 1947. The various Committees had been at work for weeks and arrangements for the reception and accommodation of delegates, entertainment and local visits were nearing completion.

As regards the meeting of the Conference itself, the original idea had been to hold it in the Council House with accommodation for nearly one thousand persons. But public interest in the Conference induced the Working Committee

to consider the idea of providing larger accommodation for the Opening Plenary Sessions by having a large sized shamiana put up. Therefore finally a big pandal was put up in the spacious grounds of the *Purana Qila* at Delhi which would admit as many as fifteen thousand people. The Plenary Sessions on March 23 and 24 were therefore to be public sessions open to delegates, observers, members of the Reception Committee, and distinguished guests specially invited. The public enthusiasm can be gauged by the fact that only the Reception Committee, presided by Sir Shri Ram, included at least 820 members. Press representatives and the general public were to participate only on purchased tickets.

From early March delegates began to arrive: among the first to arrive were from the neighbouring countries: Iran, Tibet and Afghanistan. However, by 23 March 1947 practically all of them had arrived.

The Opening Plenary Session met at 5 p.m. on March 23 at the *Purana Qila* in the Pandal which had been specially put up for the occasion. It was a grand international gathering of delegates, observers and guests. Those specially invited included foreign diplomatic officials. The visitors on tickets numbered more than ten thousand. A large map of Asia, specially prepared for the occasion, and the flags of all Asian countries added to the solemn atmosphere of the event. The delegates and observers marched in a procession to the Pandal led by the President of the session, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. The leaders of the delegation took their seats on the dais. The proceedings began with a welcome address by Sir Shri Ram, the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

The Round Table Groups and Group plenary sessions met from March 24 to April 2 according to the already decided programme. A final Plenary Session met amidst scenes of great enthusiasm on April 2 in the *Purana Qila* and attracted a gathering of nearly twenty thousand people.

The organisers of the Conference convened it with very modest hopes. As Jawaharlal Nehru mentioned in his address to the Bombay branch of the ICWA on 22 August 1946:

We have no doubt that, if we do meet, the Conference will not put an end to the world's troubles. The Conference will help to promote good relations with neighbouring countries. It will help to pool ideas and experience with a view to raising living standards. It will strengthen cultural, social and economic ties among the peoples of Asia. The data papers presented to the Conference will constitute valuable documents and the discussions on them will, we hope, throw out correct suggestions for firm policy

It was a matter of tremendous historical significance at that time that India had invited and become the venue of the first Asian Relations Conference. A section of Western academicians has ever tried to prove that Indian people and civilisation grew in splendid 'isolation'. But the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 presented a more realistic picture of Asian kinship wherein India had always a distinct place.

An admirable yet complicated pattern of Asiatic culture was represented in the first Asian Relations Conference. Over 200 delegates, representing about 30 nations of Asia, met in a most friendly atmosphere in spite of sharp differences of political, economic and social outlook. There were moments of tension, as for example, when the Jewish delegates met the delegates of the Arab world, or when the Vietnam representatives faced the loyalist delegates from Laos and Cambodia. But the overpowering sense of Asiatic fraternity, which was the life-breath of the Conference

prevented the tensions from degenerating into discourtesies and conflicts. Even though not a single Arab delegate could come to represent the case of the Palestinian Arabs, it was ably championed by the delegates from Egypt and by the observer from the Arab league who personally attended and disputed some of the statements made by the Jewish delegation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, with tact and patience, controlled the situation and the whole assembly gave a thundering applause when the leader of the Jewish delegation shook hands with the Arab delegate.

Similarly there were sharp differences also among the delegates from Indo-China. The heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people naturally roused the sympathy of Indian public; but they were also considerate and courteous to the loyalist delegates from Laos and Cambodia. Thus while there were moments of tension, there was no breakdown during the conference. The statesmanship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and the graceful personality of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu, the Chairperson, worked well. As a member of the Indian delegation put it, they piloted the vessel of the Conference through troubled waters to the banks of human fellowship and collaboration. The most significant outcome of the Conference was the creation of a goodwill among all the participants and also a permanent centre named the Asian Relations Organisation (ARO). The delegates to the Conference from every part of Asia were overwhelmed with the Indian hospitality. Whether they spoke and expressed their heart in Russian, Arabic, Tibetan or Indonesian languages, was a very minor point. The spirit of kinship grew spontaneously through sincere services rendered by Indian leaders, associates and volunteers. Each nation delivered its message to the general assembly in its native

tongue and received grand ovation as soon as the gist of the message was translated. It was indeed a very inspiring narrative of the arduous journeys of those from Mongolia, Tibet, Korea or Vietnam, covering the enormous distances in 14 to 24 days of tiring and risky journeys, by all possible routes on land, water and air.



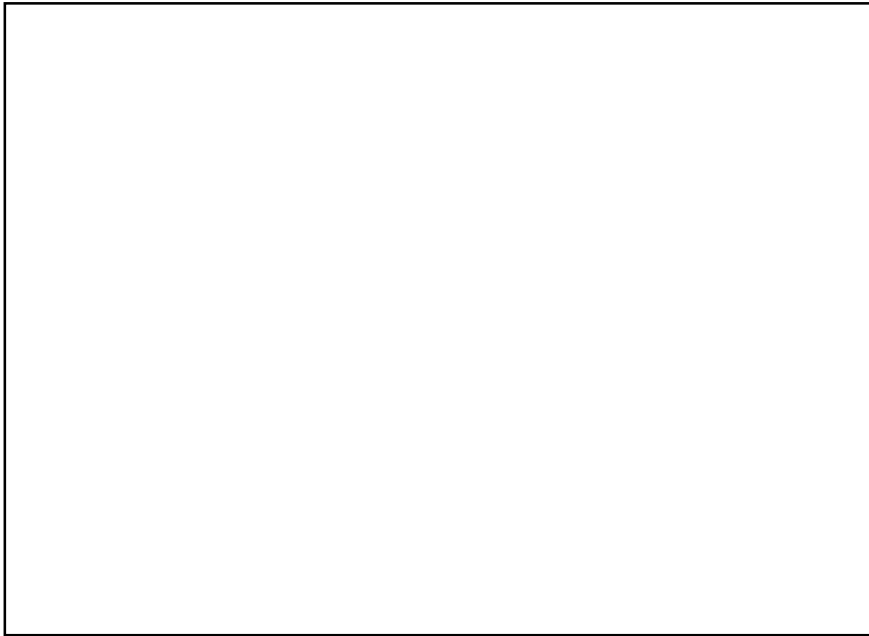
Mahatma Gandhi addressing the closing Plenary Session of the Asian Relations Conference. Below right the Tibetan flag is visible alongwith some other national flags of participating countries. (2 April 1947)

Finally, the most desired Mahatma Gandhiji suddenly reached to greet the delegates personally and to deliver his profound message of *Ahimsa* at the last session of the Conference. In fact he was least expected due to the grim communal situation which constantly and untiringly engaged him at different burning places in the country. When he reached it was felt by everyone that the fundamental issues of Truth, Non-Violence and Amity, was now placed at the top of the conference agenda. By his sincerity of purpose and far-sighted wisdom Mahatma Gandhi explained his own thought regarding what he called One World, the essence of India, the importance of one's own language and culture, and that of love and truth as the ground of human unity. The occasion

was no doubt most appropriate. A noble dream was being unfolded there through the active co-operation of Asian representatives of the newly liberated nations from the colonial yoke. The dream was already reflected in the visions of several great Indians. Gurudev Rabindranath Thakur had written about still half a century ago and it was translated into English by himself during the dark days of the first World-War:

T h e S u n s e t o f t h e C e n t u r y

*The last sun of the century sets
amidst the blood-red clouds of
West and the whirlwind of hatred.
The naked passion of self-love of
Nations, in its drunken delirium
of greed, is dancing to the clash
of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.
The crimson glow of light on the
horizon is not the light of thy
dawn of Peace, my Motherland.
It is the glimmer of the funeral pyre
burning to ashes the vast flesh,
the self-love of the Nation,
dead under its own excess.
Thy morning waits behind the
patient dark of the East. Meek
and silent.
Keep watch, India.
Bring your offerings of worship for
that sacred sunrise
Let the first hymn of its welcome
sound in your voice, and sing.
Come, Peace, thou daughter of
God's own great suffering.
Come with thy treasure of contentment,
the sword of fortitude
And meekness crowing thy forehead.*



Asian Relations Conference, Opening Plenary Session. Pandit Nehru greeting a leader of the Tibetan delegation. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu is on the left. (23/24 March 1947)

A significant feature of the Asian Relations Conference was the presence of several distinguished leaders of Tibet, which was then generally regarded as an independent country as was China. This is indeed an irony of History that several Asian countries, including the very host, India, were under colonial yoke when they came to the New Delhi conference in March 1947 — but on that occasion Tibet was participating as an independent nation, along with her *bete noire* China. Though it was also the last international event where Tibet was playing a part as an independent nation. Mr Theiji Sampho was the leader of the Tibetan delegation. At that time he was the Tibetan Accountant-General with some experience of Indian affairs. He had earlier visited India in 1942. Another member of the delegation Mr. Sampho Sey was a Secretary of the Tibetan Cabinet (*Kashag*). He had also visited India beforehand. Ven. K. Lowanji was said

to be the ecclesiastical leader of the delegation, who served for many years as one of the secretaries to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was assisted by another monk-delegate, Ven Letsen Kunga Gyaltzen, who was one of the stewards of the Golden Tomb of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The present, fourteenth Dalai Lama, was then a minor. Even though there was considerable trouble at the Regency of Lhasa at the time, the Tibetan delegates brought letters and thanka paintings from the Dalai Lama addressed to the great leader of India - Mahatma Gandhi, and also to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Two interpreters were attached to the Tibetan delegation. Mr Kapshopa Sey who was accompanied by his wife. He was educated in India and was then a member of the Tibetan foreign office and Mr Letsen Kyipuk who was educated in India and England, returning to Tibet in 1919 after training in Telegraphy and Civil Engineering. He was one of those who laid the first telegraph line between Gyantse and Lhasa.

In the Conference the entire Tibetan (and Bhutanese) delegation moved about in their magnificent robes of rich colours which attracted all the people. They were not an active participant in various deliberations at the conference committees and discussion groups. But the spare of speech they adequately compensated by their captivating smile and dignified Buddhist gestures. Their pleasant presence all the time made people realise that India's historical relations with Tibet extend over one thousand years. Tibet has always been near to the heart of India through its two sacred places, Holy Kailash and Mansarovar, visited by numerous Indian pilgrims every year. These contacts date back to the period of Mahabharata. Only the forced occupation of Tibet by China in 1949 disrupted this time old emotional, cultural

and religious contact between India and Tibet. The Tibetan Buddhist scholars have, through their faithful translations and adaptations, always helped and continue to help - though in exile - conserving some of India's most valuable branches of literature, religion and arts. Apart from it Tibet has also been the great golden link in the cultural collaboration between India and China. But these days not many people seem to understand the proper significance of this aspect of Indo-Tibetan-Chinese relations.

This is already mentioned that in the deliberations of the first Asian Relations Conference Tibetan delegation was not a very active or high-profile participant. This was partly due to their *naiveté* and partly because till that time Tibet had kept itself totally isolated from international politics. Tibet had till then been following a unique, religious and self-complacent social-political system which was the main reason behind this self-imposed isolation. Later, in the wake of communist take-over in China, it proved to be the most asinine and costly mistake committed by the Tibetan leadership of the day. Especially so as they had a long experience of claim and counter-claim by China over the issue of suzerainty over Tibet. In such a situation it was all the more important to register Tibet prominently among the comity of free nations. But the Tibetan polity of the time simply did not care or did not understand, owing mostly to its self-complacent isolation, the importance of a more active participation in international gatherings and events. Just to think over: had Tibet simply applied for the membership of the United Nations, in 1945, when they were *de facto* as well as *de jure* a free nation, they would have smoothly become the member of the world body on its own accord. Then, in the prevailing international configuration, it would

not have been possible for the red China to take over Tibet as easily and craftily as it did in 1949 and after. However, today Tibetan mistakes are but a lesson of world history fit to be taught in a school of diplomacy.

As for the evaluation of the first Asian Relations Conference itself now it can be left to the historians to judge whether and how far the aims and aspirations set by the Conference have been realised. A noted Indian historian, closely involved for a long time with what is called as Nehruwana archival research, observed that perhaps the calling of the conference was premature. Perhaps Pt Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues were marred by their own idealistic understanding of world polity at that time. And when hard realities of global politics and economics began to press Nehru hard, especially after assuming the charge of India's first independent government, he simply did not know what to do with the ARO - the permanent centre created by the first Asian Relations Conference so enthusiastically - in the new circumstances. That is why in the middle of 1955 he most unceremoniously, rather casually, instructed Dr A. Appadorai, the then Joint-General Secretary of the ARO to close down the organisation quietly because it appeared that 'there was little work for the Organisation'. Accordingly Dr Appadorai put up an office note to that effect, consigned the records of the ARO to the ICWA and transferred its meagre funds also to it. That was how the sad end came to an enterprise that was set up eight years ago with high hopes and much fanfare.

In the coming years, after the ebbing out of the initial enthusiasm generated by the first Asian Relations Conference, Afro-Asian conferences took the space of the void created

by the unbecoming of the first Asian Relations Conference. Whatever the problems, reasons and consequences of the failure of the great Asian dream — one cannot discount the import of the great Chinese debacle of 1949, when communists came to power through a violent revolution. They most cunningly and ruthlessly altered the whole shape of the Asian liberation ebullience, its new found unity and purpose. The communist Chinese held nothing sacred except world dominance of their own creed, by all means fair or foul. This was their true principle so to speak and the ruling Chinese communists believed in it wholeheartedly. The fact cannot be overemphasised that Red China did jinx the whole idea of Asian unity and fraternity which started on such a striking note in 1947 at New Delhi. Suffice it to mention that the first Asian Relations Conference had unanimously decided, as the Chinese delegation there warmly offered, to host the second conference in Peking in the year 1949. But, in the wake of communist revolution in China, that day never dawned. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise. Given the diametrically opposite world outlook they had, the ruling communist Chinese could not have allowed such communion as in the first Asian Relations Conference in Delhi to grow further. One hopes that the history of the first Asian Relations Conference, its success and failure and its consequent lessons, will be useful for reference to all those who are interested in the welfare of Asian peoples.

Inaugural Speech of Pt Jawaharlal Nehru (23 March 1947)

Friends and fellow Asians!

What has brought you here, men and women of Asia? Why have you come from the various countries of this mother continent of ours and gathered together in the ancient city of Delhi? Some of us, greatly daring, sent you invitation for this Conference and you gave a warm welcome to that invitation. And yet it was not merely that call from us but some deeper urge that brought you here.

We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history. Standing on this watershed which divides two epochs of human history and endeavour, we can look back on our long past and look forward to the future that is taking shape before our eyes. Asia, after a long period of quiescence, has suddenly become important again in world affairs. If we view the millennia of history, this continent of Asia, with which Egypt has been so intimately connected in cultural fellowship, has played a mighty role in the evolution of humanity. It was here that civilisation began and man started on his unending adventure of life. Here the mind of man searched unceasingly for truth and the spirit of man shone out like a beacon which lightened up the whole world.

This dynamic Asia from which great streams of culture flowed in all directions, gradually became static and unchanging. Other peoples and other continents came to the fore and with their new dynamism spread out and took possession of great parts of the world. This mighty continent became just

a field for the rival imperialisms of Europe, and Europe became the centre of history and progress in human affairs.

A change is coming over the scene now and Asia is again finding herself. We live in a tremendous age of transition and already the next stage takes shape when Asia takes her rightful place with the other continents.

It is at this great moment that we meet here and it is the pride and privilege of the people of India to welcome their fellow Asians from other countries, to confer with them about the present and the future, and lay the foundation of our mutual progress, well-being and friendship.

The idea of having an Asian Conference is not new and many have thought of it. It is indeed surprising that it should not have been held many years earlier, yet perhaps the time was not ripe for it and any attempt to do so would have been superficial and not in tune with world events. It so happened that we in India convened this Conference, but the idea of such a Conference arose simultaneously in many minds and in many countries of Asia. There was a widespread urge and an awareness that the time had come for us, peoples of Asia, to meet together to hold together and to advance together. It was not only a vague desire but a compulsion of events that forced all of us to think along these lines. Because of this, the invitation we in India sent out brought an answering echo and a magnificent response from every country of Asia.

We welcome you delegates and representatives from China, that great country to which Asia owes so much and from which so much is expected; from Egypt and the Arab countries of western Asia, inheritors of a proud culture which spread

far and wide and influenced India greatly; from Iran whose contacts with India go back to the dawn of history; from Indonesia and Indo-China whose history is intertwined with India's culture, and where recently the battle of freedom has continued—a reminder to us that freedom must be won and cannot come as a gift; from Turkey that has been rejuvenated by the genius of a great leader; from Korea and Mongolia, Siam, Malaya and the Philippines; from the Soviet Republics of Asia which have advanced so rapidly in our generation and which have so many lessons to teach us; and from our neighbours Afghanistan, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and Ceylon to whom we look especially for co-operation and close and friendly intercourse. Asia is very well represented at this Conference, and if one or two countries have been unable to send representatives, this was due to no lack of desire on their part or ours, but circumstances beyond our control came in the way. We welcome also observers from Australia and New Zealand because we have many problems in common, especially in the Pacific and in the Southeast region of Asia, and we have to co-operate together to find solutions.

As we meet here today, the long past of Asia rises up before us, the troubles of recent years fade away, and a thousand memories revive. But I shall not speak to you of these past ages with their glories and triumphs and failures, nor of more recent times which have oppressed us so much and which still pursue us in some measure.

During the past two hundred years we have seen the growth of Western imperialisms and of the reduction of large parts of Asia to colonial or semi-colonial status. Much has happened during these years, but perhaps one of the notable

consequences of the European domination of Asia has been the isolation of the countries of Asia from one another. India always had contacts and intercourse with her neighbour countries in the Northwest, the Northeast, the east and the Southeast. With the coming of British rule in India these contacts were broken off and India was almost completely isolated from the rest of Asia. The old land routes almost ceased to function and our chief window to the outer world looked out on the sea routes which led to England. A similar process affected the other countries of Asia also. Their entire economy was bound up with some European imperialism or other; even culturally they looked towards Europe and not to their own friends and neighbours from whom they had derived so much in the past.

Today this isolation is breaking down because of many reasons, political and other. The old imperialisms are fading away. The land routes have revived and air travel suddenly brings us very near to each other. This Conference itself is significant as an expression of that deeper urge of the mind and spirit of Asia which has persisted in spite of the isolationism which grew up during the years of European domination. As that domination goes, the walls that surrounded us fall down and we look at each other again and meet as old friends long parted.

In this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour. It is fitting that India should play her part in this new phase of Asian development. Apart from the fact that India herself is emerging into freedom and independence, she is the natural centre and focal point of the many forces at work in Asia.

Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she is so situated as to be the meeting point of western and northern and eastern and Southeast Asia. Because of this, the history of India is a long history of her relations with the other countries of Asia. Streams of culture have come to India from the west and the east and been absorbed in India, producing the rich and variegated culture which is India today. At the same time, streams of culture have flowed from India to distant parts of Asia. If you would know India you have to go to Afghanistan and Western Asia, to Central Asia, to China and Japan and to the countries of Southeast Asia. There you will find magnificent evidence of the vitality of India's culture which spread out and influenced vast numbers of people.

There came the great cultural stream from Iran to India in remote antiquity. And then that constant intercourse between India and the Far East, notably China. In later years Southeast Asia witnessed an amazing efflorescence of Indian art and culture. The mighty stream which started from Arabia and developed as a mixed Irano-Arabic culture poured into India. All these came to us and influenced us and yet so great was the powerful impress of India's own mind and culture that it could accept them without being itself swept away or overwhelmed. Nevertheless we all changed in the process and in India today all of us are mixed products of these various influences. An Indian, wherever he may go in Asia, feels a sense of kinship with the land he visits and the people he meets.

I do not wish to speak to you of the past but rather of the present. We meet here not to discuss our past history and contacts but to forge links for the future. And may I say

here that this Conference, and the idea underlying it, is in no way aggressive or against any other continent or country? Ever since news of this Conference went abroad some people in Europe or America have viewed it with doubt imagining that this was some kind of a Pan-Asian movement directed against Europe or America. We have no designs against anybody; ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world. For too long we of Asia have been petitioners in Western courts and chancellories. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own feet and to co-operate with all others who are prepared to co-operate with us. We do not intend to be the playthings of others.

In this crisis in world history Asia will necessarily play a vital role. The countries of Asia can no longer be used as pawns by others; they are bound to have their own policies in world affairs. Europe and America have contributed very greatly to human progress and for that we must yield them praise and honour, and learn from them the many lessons they have to teach. But the West has also driven us into wars and conflicts without number and even now, the day after a terrible war, there is talk of further wars in the atomic age that is upon us. In this atomic age Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part. There is today conflict in many countries, and all of us in Asia are full of our own troubles. Nevertheless, the whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful, and the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be powerful influence for world peace.

Peace can only come when nations are free and also when human beings everywhere have freedom and security and

opportunity. Peace and freedom, therefore, have to be considered both in their political and economic aspects. The countries of Asia, we must remember, are very backward and the standards of life are appallingly low. These economic problems demand urgent solution or else crisis and disaster might overwhelm us. We have, therefore, to think in terms of the common man and fashion our political, social and economic structure so that the burdens that have crushed him be removed, and he may have full opportunity for growth.

We have arrived at a stage in human affairs when the ideal of that 'One World' and some kind of a world federation seems to be essential though there are many dangers and obstacles in the way. We should work for that ideal and not for any grouping which comes in the way of this larger world group. We therefore support the United Nations structure which is painfully emerging from its infancy. But in order to have 'One World', we must also in Asia think of the countries of Asia co-operating together for that larger ideal.

This Conference, in a small measure, represents this bringing together of the countries of Asia. Whatever it may achieve, the mere fact of its taking place is itself of historic significance. Indeed this occasion is unique in history for never before has such a gathering met together at any place. So even in meeting we have achieved much and I have no doubt that out of this meeting greater things will come. When the history of our present times is written, this event may well stand out as a landmark which divides the past of Asia from the future. And because we are participating in this making of history something of the greatness of historic events comes to us all.

This Conference will split up into committees and groups to discuss various problems which are of common concern to all of us. We shall not discuss the internal politics of any country because that is rather beyond the scope of our present meeting. Naturally we are interested in these internal politics because they act and react on each other, but we may not discuss them at this stage, for if we do so, we may lose ourselves in interminable arguments and complications. We may fail to achieve the purpose for which we have met. I hope that out of this Conference some permanent Asian Institute for the study of common problems and to bring about closer relations will emerge; also perhaps a School of Asian Studies. Further, we might be able to organise interchange of visits and exchanges of students and professors so that we might know each other better. There is much else we can do, but I shall not venture to enumerate all these subjects for it is for you to discuss them and arrive at some decisions.

We seek no narrow nationalism. Nationalism has a place in each country and should be fostered, but it must not be allowed to become aggressive and come in the way of international development. Asia stretches her hand out in friendship to Europe and America as well as to our suffering brethren in Africa. We must help them to take their rightful place in the human family. The freedom that we envisage is not to be confined to this nation or that or to a particular people, but must spread out over the whole human race. That universal human freedom cannot also be based on the supremacy of any particular class. It must be the freedom of the common man everywhere and full of opportunities for him to develop.

We think today of the great architects of Asian freedom - Sun Yat-sen, Zaghul Pasha, the Ataturk Kemal Pasha and others, whose labours have borne fruit. We think also of that great figure whose labours and whose inspiration have brought India to the threshold of her independence—Mahatma Gandhi. We miss him at this Conference and I yet hope that he may visit us before our labours end. He is engrossed in the service of the common man in India, and even this Conference could not drag him away from it.

All over Asia we are passing through trials and tribulations. In India also you will see conflict and trouble. Let us not be disheartened by this: this is inevitable in an age of mighty transition. There is a new vitality and powerful creative impulse in all the peoples of Asia. The masses are awake and demand their heritage. Strong winds are blowing all over Asia. Let us not be afraid of them but rather welcome them for only with their help can we build the new Asia of our dreams. Let us have faith in these great new forces and the things which are taking shape. Above all let us have faith in the human spirit which Asia has symbolised for these long ages past.

Speech of Mr Sampho Theiji, the Tibetan leader

(24 March 1947)

Our Tibetan Government received an invitation to join in the Asian Relations Conference. We are a country which administers its subjects on the basis of religious aspirations and India being the motherland of Buddhism, we Buddhists and especially Tibet had friendly relations with India from ancient times. Therefore our Government have sent us here to attend this great Conference to maintain our peaceful relations based on religion.

In a similar way we are very glad to meet representatives from all the Asian countries in this Conference and we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the great Indian leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, and to all the distinguished representatives who have gathered in this Conference. As for the future, all the Asian Countries will feel as brothers towards each other, a feeling based on spiritual relationship, so that in this way we might hope that there will be everlasting peace and unity in Asia.

The address of Mahatma Gandhi

(2 April 1947)

I do not think that I should apologise to you for having to speak in a foreign tongue. My provincial speech, which is my mother tongue, you cannot understand and I do not want to insult you by insisting on the provincial speech. Our national speech is Hindustani. I know that it will be a long time before it can be a rival in international speech. If there is rivalry it is between French and English. In international commerce undoubtedly English occupies the first place. For diplomatic speech and correspondence, I used to hear when I was studying in my boyhood that French was the language of diplomacy, and if you, wanted to go from one end of Europe to the other you must try and pick up French. So I tried to pick up a few words of French in order that I may be able to make myself understood. Anyway if there is any rivalry at all it lies between French and English. Therefore, having been taught English, naturally I have to resort to speaking to you through that international speech.

I was wondering what I was to speak to you. I wanted to collect my thoughts, but let me confess to you that I had no time and yet I had promised yesterday that I will try to say a few words to you. I remember I wanted to think out and I said to myself, *"you friends have seen not the real India; you are not meeting in conference in the midst of real India. Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Lahore—all these are big cities and have been influenced by the West."* I then thought of a story. It was in French. It was got translated for me by an Anglo-French friend. He was a philosopher. He was an unselfish man who befriended me without my having known him because he always sided with the minorities and

I was—that is, my countrymen were—in a hopeless minority; not only a hopeless but a despised minority. If the Europeans of South Africa will forgive me for saying so, we were all coolies. I was an insignificant coolie lawyer. At that time we had no coolie doctors. We have no coolie lawyers. I was the first in the field, nevertheless a coolie. You will pardon me, those of you who know the story, if in recalling I make mistakes here and there, but there will be no mistake in the main incidents. It is of course an imaginary story. There were three scientists. Three scientists went out from France, went out of Europe in search of truth. That was the first lesson. That story taught me that if truth was to be searched it was not to be found on the soil of Europe, and therefore, undoubtedly not in America. These three scientists went to different parts of Asia. One of them found his way to India and he began his search. He went to the so-called cities of those times. Naturally this was before the British occupation, before even the Moghul period. (That is how the French author has illustrated the story). But still he went through the cities. He saw the so-called high-caste people, men and women, till at last he penetrated a humble cottage in a humble village that was a *bhangis* cottage and he found the truth that he was in search of in that *bhangis* family. I wanted to connect that story with what I wanted to say to you. If you really want to see India at its best, you have to find it in the humble *bhangis* home. And such villages, so the English historians teach us, are 700,000. A few cities here and there do not hold several crores of people but 700,000 villages do hold nearly 40 crores of people. I say nearly because you may take away one crore perhaps, may be two crores, in these cities. Still there would be 38 crores. Then I said to myself, 'if these friends go away without

finding their true India what will they have found?' I then thought that I would beseech you to imagine this India not from this vast audience, but to imagine what it would be like. See perhaps a few villages of India. Then you will find the real India. Today I will make this admission also that you will not be fascinated by the sight. You'll have to scratch down below the dung heaps that these villages are today. I do not pretend to say that they were ever places of paradise, but today they are really dung heaps. They were not like that before; of that I am quite sure. I speak not from history but from what I have seen of India myself with my physical eyes. I have travelled from one end of India to the other seeing these villages, seeing the miserable specimens of humanity with their lustreless eyes. Yet they are the India and yet in those humble cottages, in the midst of those dung heaps are to be found the humble *bhangis*, where you will find the concentrated essence of wisdom.

How? That is a great question. But then I want to take you to another scene. Again I have learnt from books, books written by English historians and translated for me. But they tell us that wisdom came to the West from the East. And who is this wise man? Zoroaster - he belonged to the East. He was followed by the Buddha. He belonged to the East. He belonged to India. Who followed the Buddha? Jesus - again from Asia. Before Jesus who was there? Moses, also belonging to Palestine, though he was born in Egypt. And then came Jesus, then came Mohammed. I do not know a single person to patch these men of Asia. And what happened? Christianity became disfigured when it went to the West. I am sorry to have to say that, but that is my reading.

I gave you this story in order to hearten you and in order to make you understand, *if my poor speech can make you understand, that what you see of the splendour and everything else in the cities of India is not real India.* Certainly the carnage that is going on before your very eyes is a sorry and shameful thing. Do not carry the memory of that carnage beyond the confines of India. But what I want you to understand if you can is that the message of the East, the message of Asia is not to be learnt through European spectacles, not by imitating the vices of the West, its gunpowder and atom bomb. If you want to give a message of importance to the West it must be a message of love. It must be a message of truth. Let your hearts clap in unison with what I am saying and then I think I shall have finished my work.

Therefore, I want you to go away with the thought that Asia has to conquer the West. Again the question that a friend asked yesterday: did I believe in one world? Of course I believe in one world. How can I possibly do otherwise? You and I are the inheritors of the message of love that these great and unconquerable teachers have left for us. You can re-deliver that message now in this age of democracy, in the age of an awakening of the poorest of the poor. You can re-deliver this message with the greatest emphasis. Then you will complete the conquest of the whole of the West. I am so sanguine that if all of you put, not merely your heads but hearts together, understand the secret of the message which all these wise men of the East have left for us, and if we really become worthy of that great message, then you will easily understand that the conquest of the West will be completed and that conquest will be felt by the West itself. The West is today pining for wisdom. It

is despairing of multiplication of atom bombs because such multiplication must destroy not merely all the West but the whole world. I am afraid the prophecy of the Bible is going to be fulfilled and there is to be a perfect deluge. Heaven forbid that there will be that deluge, and that through men's wrongs. It is up to you to deliver the whole world and not merely Asia from wickedness and sin. That is the precious heritage which your teachers and my teachers have left for us.

The Friedrich-Naumann Foundation was established in 1958 by the Federal President Theodor Heuss and named after the great liberal statesman Friedrich Naumann, who died in 1919. It is a non-profit making organization devoted to public benefit.

The Friedrich-Naumann Foundation promotes ideas on liberty and training in freedom, and the liberal principle of Freedom in Human Dignity in all sectors of society, both nationally as well as internationally, in developed as well as developing countries.

The Foundation is active in more than 75 countries. In Germany, it concentrates on workshops and seminars on political participation and political education, while in the South Asian Region comprising the SAARC countries the Foundation's work encompasses projects concerned with support for economic liberalisation; fostering regional economic co-operation in South Asia; promotion of small and medium scale industries; consumer advocacy; promotion of civic rights; and environmental protection.

All these activities are carried out in co-operation with local, national and international NGOs, the emphasis being on self-reliance and the setting up of democratic institutions.

The activities of the Foundation in South Asia are directed from the Regional Office in New Delhi.

Friedrich-Naumann Foundation has set up the Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre (TPPRC) with the purpose of strengthening the Tibetan diaspora in building up a healthy democratic working etho through the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies. The objective is to prepare the Tibetans in exile and particularly the young

amongst them, for the assumption of responsibilities that would respond to their hopes and aspirations through a framework of legislative, executive and judicial institutions based on the concept of the Tibetan polity guided by *Saddharma* and with a view to generating human values and considerations based on man's free will, equality, justice and non-violence. There is also the standing need to constantly remind the Tibetan diaspora of their national identity, culture and heritage and the global community of Tibet's unique contribution to the world of thought and culture.

