

LOTUS: THE NATIONAL FLOWER OF VIETNAM ITS CONNECTION TO BUDDHA DHARMA

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ABSTRACT:

Lotus is used as a primary emblem in Buddha Dharma and signifies the cleanliness of the body, speech, and mind. The lotus is a representation of purity in Buddhist iconography, transcending beyond material connection and bodily yearning. The traditional accounts claim, seven lotuses bloomed when Gautama took his first seven steps. Buddha Dharma adheres to this meaning in the same way that it mentions the beauty of the lotus that emerges from muddy waterways. The water droplets that simply slide off the lotus petals are another sign of detachment. The Gautama Buddha equates himself to a lotus flower in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, stating that just as the lotus flower emerges unstained from the murky water, so too does he emerge from this world free of the impurities mentioned in the relevant sutta. The typical pedestal for the majority of significant characters in Buddhist art, as well as frequently that of other Indian faiths, is a lotus chair.

The Lotus Dance was first developed in the monarchs' palaces of Vietnam in the 1600s and is now done all over the world. The spectacle, which is a part of Buddhist customs, celebrates the arrival of the Buddha by simulating the opening of a lotus flower. In Buddha Dharma, the lotus has always stood at the cynosure of the Buddha veneration; along with the pigment of the lotus denoting various meanings. Given their ease of cultivation, notably in the northern, central, and southern areas, the lotus is a rare bloom that has been grown for an extended period in Vietnam. The lotus frequently blossoms in the summer but it also varies for other parts of the nation. For instance, it frequently blossoms in the south in late May and the north in early March. The blooms typically retain their shape and hue for two months before beginning to wilt in July.

Apart from Gautama, many other Buddhist deities share the lotus as their symbol like Padmasambhava, the Lotus-Born is regarded as the Second Buddha in Tibet; frequently appears clutching a blossom. According to one story, he was born inside a lotus blossom. The paper at hand will talk about the importance of the lotus in Vietnamese culture and its affiliations with the Buddha and his teachings as a symbol. It will also talk about the different meanings behind the different hues of the lotus flowers.

KEYWORDS – VIETNAM, LOTUS, BUDDHA DHARMA.

Vietnam stretches over 1,27,000 square miles; a Southeast Asian nation located in the eastern half of the Indochina peninsula. Vietnam shares frontiers with China, Laos, and Cambodia. Vietnam comprises of South China Sea shoreline to its east and south along with massive rivers, marshland deltas, and abundant fields of rice. Several kinds of flora and fauna are found in Vietnam's highlands, forests, marshes, and beaches; one of these is a well-known symbol - The lovely lotus¹, Vietnam's national flower, is represented by this insignia. *Nelumbo nucifera*, the lotus is an aquatic plant that grows in muddy nutritious surroundings. This plant, which can be found in India, Australia, Southeast Asia, and East Africa, has a captivating and dynamic daily life cycle. Apart from Vietnam; India and Sri Lanka share Lotus as their national flower.

With their long stems extending up to the surface of the water, lotuses lodge themselves in the mud. The extravagant blossoms open one by one as the lotus blooms. Each flower rises spotless from the water, due to an outer layer of resistance that restricts water and dirt. These day-blooming plants close up at night, then reopen in the morning. In addition to being seen as a representation of purity, lotus blossoms further symbolize endurance, power, and rebirth since they emerge from the dark water at dawn and return to it at dusk. The lotus in its full bloom smells like, a light citrusy scent with overtones of spice in addition to its sweet fragrance. Another meaning of the lotus flower is transcendence as it springs up from the realm of darkness into the realm of light, the lotus conveys the attainment of peace over material things; Like:

- The Blue Lotus flower represents the triumph of the mind. A blue lotus usually represents the perfection of wisdom. It is associated with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī². Dōgen³ wrote of blue lotuses in the *Kuge (Flowers of Space)* fascicle of *Shōbōgenzō* (Nishiyama). Similarly, the purple lotus The noble eightfold path, which consists of the following eight virtues: right vision or understanding, the right emotion, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation or concentration. The noble eightfold path, according to the Buddha, is the route to self-awakening. In esoteric Buddha Dharma, a purple lotus is rare and mystical and might convey many things, depending on the number of flowers clustered together. They may be supported by a simple stem, a triple stem (symbolizing the three divisions of Garbhadhatu⁴: Vairocana⁵, lotus, and vajra), or a quintuple stem. The eight petals represent the Noble Eightfold Path and the eight principal acolyte deities of the central deity on the mandalas. The flowers may also be depicted presented in a cup or on a tray, as a symbol of homage.
- The White Lotus flower represents spiritual completeness, enlightenment, and a condition of mental chastity. It is the lotus found at the heart of the Garbhadhatu Mandala, being the womb or embryo of the world. It is characteristic of the esoteric sects, and the lotus of the Buddhas. This symbolizes Bodhi, the state of total mental purity and spiritual perfection, and the pacification of our nature. It generally has eight petals corresponding to the Noble Eightfold Path.

¹ *Nelumbo nucifera*
Kingdom: Plantae
Hoa Sen – Vietnamese.

² Revered as an embodiment of *prajñā* (wisdom).

³ Dōgen Zenji - 26 January 1200 – 22 September 1253; founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism, Japan.

⁴ The Womb Realm is depicted as a symbol in Esoteric Buddhism by the Womb Realm Mandala.

⁵ Cosmic Buddha

- The Red Lotus flower is associated with compassion. This symbolizes the original nature of the heart. It is the lotus of passion, activity, and all the qualities of the heart. It is the lotus of Avalokitesvara - the Bodhisattva of compassion. It also is associated with the heart and with our original, pure nature.
- The Pink Lotus flower is the supreme lotus because it is attached to the Buddha's birth and is considered the Buddha's lotus. A pink lotus represents the Buddha and the history and succession of Buddhas. This is the supreme lotus, generally reserved for the highest deity, sometimes confused with the white lotus it is the lotus of the historical Buddha. Padmasambhava, who is regarded as the Second Buddha In Tibet wears a pink lotus hat. (Wangpo)

Tropical woods formerly blanketed the terrain of Vietnam; nearly all of Vietnam's mountainous and hilly terrain is still covered with lush green vegetation. The low, flat marsh that the Mekong River⁶ system has developed allows the nation to have such rich rice fields. Tropical, hot, and extremely humid conditions predominate while; the hot and wet season might linger for months. Vietnam receives year-highs of 90 degrees Fahrenheit⁷ in some regions. Every summer, a violent monsoon season arrives in several regions of Vietnam. In Vietnam, lotus fields often bloom with stunning white or pink blossoms around May and August. The lotus blossom is shown in multiple forms throughout Vietnam, notably as a decorative pattern, a component of regional creativity, cuisine a representation in religious sites and other structures, and the creations of musicians and artists. By the last quarter of the second century CE, Luy Lâu in the contemporary Bắc Ninh Province, northeast of the current capital city of Hanoi, had grown into a significant regional Mahayana Buddhist stronghold. Jiaozhi's Han region's capital, Luy Lâu, was a well-liked stop for many Indian Buddhist missionaries journeying to China. The monks travelled the same sea path that Indian traders took to get from the Indian subcontinent to China. There, the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters (Sharf) and the Anapanasati, among other Mahayana sutras, were translated into Classical Chinese. Vietnamese Thiến according to classical accounts refers to Vinītaruci, who reached Vietnam after completing his education under Sengcan.

The Vietnamese people have ceremonies honouring their 1945 independence annually to mark the foundation of their modern nation Farmers began cultivating lotus plants more often after the Vietnam War. With a history rooted in the collective fight for independence from colonial control and the national struggle for gaining independence, India and Vietnam have decades of cordial bilateral relations. The International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC), established following the Geneva Accord of 1954 that aided the peace process in Vietnam, was headed by India. India initially maintained consular-level ties with the former North and South Vietnams before on January 7, 1972, developing complete diplomatic relations with the country as a whole. When Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng visited India in July 2007, the two nations' relations were raised to the status of "Strategic Partnership." Later Prime Minister Modi visited Vietnam in 2016, and thus from thereon bilateral ties significantly strengthened.

⁶ The Mekong acts as a trans-boundary; thus separating East and South East Asia.

⁷ 32 degrees celsius

Lotus farming has become more popular in Vietnam since the lotus has become a flower that is cultivated for commercial purposes and sold to people to beautify their houses and use as food and medicine. The lotus was adopted as Vietnam's national flower by the National Assembly in 2013. Lotus tea has always played a significant role in Vietnamese tea customs. Drinking lotus tea has long been considered a sign of royalty and nobility's sturdiness. Vietnamese people were inspired by this notion to develop a wide range of traditions surrounding the use of lotus tea. One of the greatest growing regions for lotus in the northern region of Vietnam is the Duy Tien District in Ha Nam Province.

Lotus farming is an alternative to rice planting in locations that are vulnerable to flooding, such as the towns to the north of Hanoi. Lotus farmers tend lotus plant fields in these locations. The lotus blooms, seeds, and other edible plant components are subsequently sold by farmers. The ubiquitous presence of the lotus in indigenous literary works, art, and architecture, nonetheless, alludes to the profound fondness of the flower. Each Vietnamese hamlet has four things in common as part of a long-standing custom: a village gate, a bamboo hedgerow, a banyan tree, and a lotus pond adjacent to the banyan tree. Many love poems also refer to the lotus' lovely colour. Like in the past, the younger generations would frequently congregate around the lotus pond to collect water for personal use and to socialize. Young couples frequently went there to date. Over time, the lotus blossom evolved to symbolize passionate love.

According to estimates, lotus silk ranked among the most costly varieties of silk in the world in 2020. The extraction of the yarn, spinning of the silk threads into yarn, and weaving of the garments are all done entirely by hand, which adds to the processing time. This reduces the amount of cloth that can be produced. The lotus stem must be cleansed of mud and thorns after collection; the cleaner the stalk, the more attractive the white silk thread will be. If not handled within 24 hours, all lotus stalks will dry out and the silk will be irreparably harmed. The lotus stem must be cut open with a knife to expose the silk, then twirled and drawn the silk with the help of your fingers.

According to scholars like (Vanaik), and (Montgomery); around 400 BCE, when the southeast Asian lands first made contact with the Indian subcontinent, a slow process of "Indianization" began. Traders and religious leaders imported Indian concepts, such as religions, civilizations, constructions, and political systems, which were then embraced by local rulers. In response, local monarchs invited Indian Brahmins and monks to reside in their kingdoms and assist in changing local governments into more Indianized societies by fusing Indian and indigenous customs with Pali and Sanskrit as leading languages for scholarly purposes; gradually catering to Southeast Asia.

The Indian style of veneration has always relied on imagery to communicate reality and throughout history has been the significance of symbols. It can be deduced that the development of Indian religious thinking was based on the explanation of the basic truths of reality through observation and experience using an array of symbols. Perhaps the most insightful act is to convey an intricate idea to folks regarding the absence of scientific validations. Intangibility might be expressed using symbols. Since Indian divination focused on holding a dual reality, namely the realm of fundamentals and the realm of facades, a framework of symbols was also indispensable; while the reality in itself was obscure and beyond the description of words. The lotus has significant iconographic significance in both the wider and the miniature worldview. For both India and Vietnam, the lotus holds a symbolic

significance since it fits into this group of beliefs and ideals. In the universal perspective of Indian culture, the plant was associated with holy meaning. The significance of the lotus in religious traditions has led to its usage in sculpture, architecture, and art. The lotus leaf, bud, flower, petals, and most importantly how its blossoming are all connected to many religious concepts. Similarly, intentional symbolism in art causes viewers to recall these associations. The lotus blossom in the Buddha's hand symbolizes a giving of compassion or knowledge.

The lotus throne is one of the representations of the lotus images seen in Buddhist art. Figures of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other important deities are often shown either reclining or standing on a lotus in full bloom throughout the majority of Buddhist Asia's paintings and sculptures. The lotus throne represents the divine expression and flawless spiritual condition of these deities since they are regarded as enlightened beings. The benevolent female deity Green Tara is frequently seen in Tibetan Buddhist art sitting on a lotus with her right leg outstretched, signifying her readiness to take action to aid beings. Her right foot is generally shown resting on a different lotus. The lotus flower's petals are frequently layered in sculptures and paintings to represent the blossom opening up with each petal given linear texturing to create volume and gilding to enhance its delicate beauty. The lotus expresses the Buddha nature that is inside each of us. Buddha's nature is pure and transparent, and it is uncontaminated. Although we pursue the path of ignorance and get caught in the squalor of mundaneness, and are forced to live in agony and therefore cannot detect the Buddha Nature in us. Several texts talk of a lotus and a flower and a symbol; a few of them are :

1. According to the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, "the clear mind is Bodhimandala is a spotless location. Therefore, it is the attitude of righteousness that Buddhists must put into practice in daily life so that we might benefit, just as a lotus grows straight up from the muck before exhibiting its beauty. The Lotus tree does not grow from seed; rather, it grows from the roots.
2. The *Lalitavistara* asserts that "the essence of the noblest of men is flawless, like the new lotus in the muddy water which adheres to it, while esoteric Buddha Dharma claims that the essence of the beings is like an enclosed lotus: when the virtues of the Buddha develop therein, the lotus blossoms.
3. The "*Lotus Sutra*" *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*; Sutra on the White lotus of the true dharma; is a collection of 28 chapters that are mostly written in verse and contain chants and mantras. The "Lotus Sutra" (Abbot) employs metaphors in the form of parables that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. It is regarded as the most important of all sutras, and it is thought that learning and comprehending them will lead one to nirvana. This Lotus Stra is noted for providing in-depth instruction, predominantly in the form of parables, on the idea and application of skillful ways, the eighth paramita or perfection of a Bodhisattva. It is revealed that the "three vehicles" and the numerous "skillful" or "expedient" methods are all a part of the One Vehicle (Ekayana), which is also the Bodhisattva path. Another notable feature of this sutra is the usage of the word Mahayana, which means "Great Vehicle." This sutra contains a wealth of knowledge and conveys many significant ideas. The fundamental tenet of the "Lotus Sutra" is that everyone is equal and has the same inherent capacity for enlightenment and becoming a Buddha. This is different from other traditions that occasionally discriminate against certain racial, social class/caste, or gendered categories of individuals. The Buddha's compassion and desire to help all creatures drove him to modify the teaching to suit a variety of persons, which is why the One Vehicle in the Lotus Stra incorporates so many diverse

teachings. The Lotus Sutra's twelfth chapter teaches that everyone can become enlightened (Teiser and Stone), even the historical Devadatta, who may have become a Buddha. The tale of Devadatta is followed by a second tale about a dragon princess who is both a nymph and a woman and who, according to the bodhisattva Manjusri, will become enlightened in her current state instantly.

4. According to the Mahayana teachings' Bodhisattva-ideal, the tenth chapter highlights that anybody can achieve enlightenment. In addition to laypeople, bodhisattvas, sravakas, monks, and nuns, all living things have the potential to become Buddhas. It also illustrates how anybody or every detail could be used as a "teacher of the Dharma."

5. The book by Thích Nhất Hạnh⁸, *No Mud, No Lotus* describes techniques for experiencing hardship without becoming overcome by it and the craft of contentment and helps us notice the marvels within and surrounding us that we frequently take for granted with his trademark clarity and feeling of delight. Not avoiding sorrow, but instead accepting and transforming it, is the key to pleasure. Thích Nhất Hạnh provides techniques and inspiration for overcoming suffering and discovering genuine joy in *No Mud, No Lotus*. Thích Nhất Hạnh has significantly impacted the masses and especially the youth with his concept of Engaged Buddhism (Gleig) and is revered worldwide as a visionary, author, and as peace activist.

The lotus dance, also known as *Mua Hoa Dang*, is one of the national dances of Vietnam and dates back to the early 1600s when a feudal system still ruled the country. Traditionally, it was exclusively carried out in the "Thai Hoa" Imperial Palace during the Emperor's prayers to the Buddha for peace and prosperity for the country. The lotus blossom, floating above the murky rivers of attachment and desire, represents the primal clarity of body, speech, and intellect. Vietnam is now seen by India as a cornerstone of its Act East Policy and a key ally in its Indo-Pacific strategy. Vietnam's role in India's regional policy is progressively growing, and the next phase of the Act East Policy is becoming a crucial pillar for India. We acknowledge that relations between Vietnam and India have rapidly improved since the Act East.

When all of the required elements come together, its roots remain in the mud for a considerable amount of time before germinating. Patience is a quality that comes from waiting. When someone has this trait of perseverance, they will undoubtedly succeed in anything they set out to do. Otherwise, it is challenging to do. For this reason, the Buddha is seated on a blossoming lotus. The lotus represents innocence and resignation. The lotus has roots in the muck at the pond's bottom, while its exquisite blossom is located above the water. The same symbols can represent the body's "internal lotuses," or energy centers (chakra). "Internal lotuses," energy centers (chakra), can be represented by the same symbols. The Buddha's teachings were characterized by humanism, which transcended all ethnic and national boundaries to become a powerful force for world peace. But currently, a rise in egoism, both on an individual and collective level, makes peace which is needed for a world community to thrive; challenging to accomplish. "Mani Padme Hum, the Buddhist mantra is often referred to as the Jewel in the Lotus or the Compassion Mantra. This potent mantra trains to train the mind for the highest levels of tranquility and pleasure.

⁸ 11 October 1926 – 22 January 2022

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