CHAPTER III
Freedom Movement, our Leaders and Buddhism

(A) Freedom Movement and Buddhism. 38
(B) Gandhiji and Buddhism. 41
(C) J.L. Nehru and Buddhism. 43
(D) Rahul Sankrityayan and Buddhism. 43
(E) Acharya Narendra Dev and Buddhism. 44
Like the seed of a mighty tree our freedom struggle began in a small way, and the seed was sown in Bengal over 125 years ago by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and from that day onwards the struggle continued unabated, the leaders always aiming high but at the same time keeping their feet planted on solid earth. Two movements seemingly unconnected with each other began side by side. Freedom struggle and the movement of the revival of Buddhism are being referred here. It cannot be denied that the days of glory in this great country coincided with the general acceptance of the Buddhist doctrine by the common people of this land. With Buddhism falling into popular disfavour began also our political disintegration, which one can now see in the retrospect from beginning to end. Till the 19th century, all places hallowed by association with Buddha were forgotten and lay underground or were lost in big jungles not only their identity but even their memory was lost. Thousands of stupas and pillars erected by Ashoka and generations of devotees lay neglected, broken or had disappeared altogether. There were inscriptions on rocks and pillars, but nobody could read them nor did anybody care to do so. Buddhism was not remembered even as a bad dream.  

With the disappearance of Buddhism disappeared the freedom of the country, and its people became subject to alien rule. Century after century continued this state of affairs. Buddhist sacred literature was full of references to sacred places like Lumbini, where the blessed one was born and Bodh Gaya, where he attained enlightenment, and the Deer Park and Kashi, where he preached his first sermon, and Kushinara, where he attained Nirvana. And Pali books mentioned at length Ashoka, the mighty Emperor, who became a Buddhist and how he exerted to establish the rule of Dhamma in the land. But in India the glories of Bodh Gaya and the Deer Park sank into oblivion, and no one knew anything about Lumbini and Kushinara and we did not know who Ashoka was, how mighty was his rule and at the same time how unerringly he had pointed out the path for ever for the salvation of mankind.

This incredible state of affairs continued right up almost to the end of the 18th century. Early in the 19th century began, the struggle for Indian freedom, and side by side began, with the assistance of English and European scholars, our interest and pride in Buddhism.

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The eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were Buddhist countries and slowly it reads almost like a romance after much debate and disagreement of competent opinion among archaeologists were discovered the sacred Buddhist places. How each one was excavated and came to light, and how different Ashoka inscriptions on rocks and pillars were discovered and deciphered is each a fascinating story. How owing to the waywardness of someone down south in Mysore 2200 years ago, who added the name of Ashoka in one of the immortal inscriptions, it was determined that Emperor Piyadasi of the inscriptions everywhere was none but Ashoka, the beloved of the gods. The story of discovery of these places one after another is a wondrous tale. Take, for instance, the way in which the broken pillar in the heart of jungle at Lumbini (now it is called Rummindel) was dug up many feet down under the ground, and out came the inscription, so fresh and complete and unbroken as if it were inscribed yesterday, saying that it was the place, where there the blessed one was born, and that the pillar had been ordered to be erected on that spot by the beloved of the gods. The intense interest which a British forest officer took in Archaeology led to the identification of Kasia with Kusinara of Buddhist sacred literature, and almost the very place where the blessed one breathed his last has not been determined. So also have been identified other places like Sarnath in Kashi and Bodh Gaya, where still stands the sacred Bodhi tree, almost on the very spot where he sat down, resolved not to rise till he solved the riddle of existence. The whole of the 19th century was occupied by our preparation for the struggle for our political emancipation, and so it was also by the recovery from oblivion of all that is sacred in Buddhist history and legend. Places like ancient Sravasti (now it has been declared a district of U.P. by Ms. Mayawati’s government with a view to attracting Buddhists from India and abroad) and Kausambi (It has also been declared a district in U.P.) and forgotten Rajgir and Nalanda and dozens of others came to light, and so did inscriptions at far scattered places like Kalsi in Dehradun district and Dhauli in far east near Jagannath Puri, and another down south in Mysore. Along with this era of discovery also began the revival of Buddhism and reemergence of love for its excellent doctrine in the heart of the Indian people. Indians came to recognize more and more the greatness of Gautam Buddha, and the excellence of his teaching and his message of love and non-violence for the promotion of the welfare of the mankind. And then Ceylon repaid its old debt of gratitude. Ashoka had sent his son and daughter with a sapling from the sacred tree at Bodh Gaya. That tree planted by those pious hands still flourishes and in 1891 came a Buddhist missionary (Venerable Dharmapala) from Ceylon, and when he saw the condition of the Buddhist shrines at Bodh Gaya his heart
was filled with grief. He founded the Maha Bodhi Society, and then commenced his great campaign for the recovery of the ancient temple at Bodh Gaya under Buddhist management. He did not succeed in his life, but he achieved a greater success. He revived Buddhism in India and made its glory and excellence known throughout the land. One has only to visit Sarnath to see the visual proof of what he achieved.¹

In the 20th century our freedom struggle became acute and gained in intensity. The appeal of Buddha’s teachings also influenced Indians. The books, large and small, which have been published in this half century about Buddhism are simply enormous, and into every home has permeated the message of the Buddha. And when Gandhi came and preached love and nonviolence and taught us to stand firm against evil, that was the essence of the teachings of the Buddha. And the culmination of all is the most wonderful, and in that culmination we have forever united ourselves with Buddha and his most renowned disciple Ashoka. When we gained our freedom the question arose what shall be the national flag, which would inspire us and guide and protect us for all time and we chose our flag and embossed upon it the chakra, the great wheel of the law continually invites us to tread in the path of righteousness. And then when we sought our national emblem, where did we turn to? We turned again to the pillar erected by Ashoka, and we adopted the four lions which he had erected as a capital to his pillar at Sarnath, and those lions now stand erect not only as the guardians of our Dharma Chakra, but also indicate that we shall guard our freedom with all our might against aggressors from all quarters of the globe. Thus Buddhism and Ashoka have now entered the innermost recesses of our national life. And then consider further that in this land inhabited by people of different faiths and sects and creeds we have set up a secular state demanding from each citizen righteous conduct and guaranteeing to each equality of opportunity and of protection. That is also again the very essence of Buddhism. For each one Buddha prescribed the middle path, the path of righteousness, and to everyone he gave shelter and protection without discrimination.²

² Ibid, Page 316.
When Gandhiji begins to think about Krishna, Rama, the Buddha and Jesus, he sees it difficult to say who was the greatest among Krishan, Rama, the Buddha and Jesus. Their achievements differed, because they lived in different times and under different circumstances. In point of character alone, possibly the Buddha was the greatest.\(^1\)

Dr. Ambedkar, scholar, thinker, social revolutionary and democrat opined that Gandhi’s non-violence sprang from Jainism and not from Buddha who never stretched it to the extreme view of Jainism.\(^2\)

Gandhi Ji declared once “The religion named after Gautam Buddha cherishes the same ideals as Hinduism”.\(^3\)

Tagore expressed about Gandhiji that Gandhi said what Buddha had done in his time and for all time to come “Conquer anger by the power of non-anger and evil by the power of good”.\(^4\)

Gandhiji claimed that he was following in the footsteps of the great teachers Buddha and Christ.\(^5\) Gandhiji said although he did not stand comparison with Buddha and Christ, even so he aspired to be their equal in love. He requested the readers not to think him presumptuous on that account. The highest ideal he had set before him was Mehta of Gujarat as he thought that Narsinha Mehta’s love was no less than that of Buddha.\(^6\)

Listening to Gandhiji, Percival London stated, one was again and again reminded of the beautiful vision of a world of selfless kindness that Gautam Buddha inculcated twenty four centuries earlier- a world that never existed, a vision which had left human nature unchanged.\(^7\)

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1. CWG Vol. IX Page 320 (The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi)
3. Ibid, Page 257.
5. Young India, Mahatma Gandhi (Tagore & Co.) 1919.
On May 18, 1924, Gandhiji delivered at Juhu the first speech after his release, on Gautam Buddha, it being Buddha Jayanti Day. In the speech he said that religion to him was a living faith in the supreme unseen force. He was more than most people endeavoring to popularize that truth for which Gautam Buddha lived and died. Buddhism, Gandhiji continued, was a part of Hinduism, Buddha did not give a new religion, he gave Hinduism a new interpretation.

He taught Hindus not to take but to give life. It was Gandhi’s unalterable belief that India had fallen low not because she accepted Gautama’s teachings but because she failed to, live up to it. A couple of days later he said that Jainism and Buddhism were mighty reforms in Hinduism.

During his tour to Ceylon, he was received warmly by the Buddhists as well as the Christians. Gandhiji was in a Buddhist country and naturally he proudly told the audience that his eldest son accused him of being a follower of the Buddha. He told them that Gautam was the greatest Hindu reformer. Gautama was a Hindu of the Hindus. He never rejected the message of the vedas, Gandhi concluded but introduced a living reformation in the petrified faith that surrounded him. A Japanese monk, who was living at his Ashram, was arrested by the police. Gandhi repeated his prayer, “I bow to the Buddha”.

Gandhi claimed that wisdom went to the west from the east through Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Moses and also from Mohammed. Gandhi took Gautam Buddha’s compassion but not his reason.

Buddhism he said, had a reforming effect on Hinduism, somewhat similar to that of Protestantism on Catholicism. Although Buddhism was said to have declined in India, the spirit of Buddhists remained in the country.

Gandhi did not like the declaration of Dr. Ambedkar to embrace Buddhism. In fact Gandhiji wanted to exploit the teachings of Buddha but never tried to sincerely achieve his vision.

1. MSG (MILLIN, Sarah Gertrude, Gen. Snats), Page 23.
3. Ibid, Page 87.
* the gratitude from Rahul Sankrityayan by Gunakar Mule
C:-  JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU AND BUDDHISM

He attended the celebrations of the homecoming of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana. Speaking on this occasion, the Prime Minister of India, J.L. Nehru said that he saw in the teachings of the Buddha a path leading to progress and prosperity and that he had made it his life mission to make others conscious of this revelation to him. He further said that the incident of the home coming of the relics had a deeper significance to his mind and that the significance would be realized when all of them had made a living temple in their hearts enshrining ancient memories for guidance in this confused world. Concluding, Nehru said; “Out of this conference a seed will bloom and spread ‘happiness’. Thus the Sanchi celebrations opened a new vista for the revival of Buddhism in India.¹

Jawahar Lal Nehru declared once, “No orthodox religion attracts me, but if I had to choose, it would certainly be Buddhism”.²

D:-  RAHUL SANKRITYAYAN AND BUDDHISM:

Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan was born in 1893 on 9th April at village Pandaha in district Azamgarh, U.P. His original name was Kedarnath. He was by nature a very adventurous person. He invited ups and downs, played with upheavals, traveled far and wide to attain light in all its forms. He was every inch an extra ordinary person whose intellect was exemplary in every country at every period of time. His deeds provided a lot of contribution to Buddhist literature and Buddhism. He was honest to his conclusions and assessments. In 1917 he felt inclination towards Buddhism, and he travelled Kusinagar, Lumbini and Bodhgaya. In 1926 he saw first time Bhadant Anand Kosalyayan. This year he also travelled Kashmir, Laddakh, western Tibet and Kannah.³

During the period between 1927 and 1928, he taught for 19 months in Srilanka and studied Buddhist literature. There he also was conferred the title of “Tripitakacharya”. He became a Buddhist monk in 1930. In 1929-30 he first time travelled Tibet.

². Buddhism in Modern India by D.C. Ahir, Page 134.
³. Swayambhu Mahapandit, Gunakar Mule, Page 266.
Acharya Narendra Dev.

*With gratitude from his age & Ideals by G. Mule.
He also sojourned for nine months in Lhasa. Khasi Pandit Sabha conferred upon him the title of ‘Mahapandit’. During this period he adopted the new name “Rahul Sankrityayan”. He also wrote “Buddha Charya”. In 1934, he second time travelled Tibet. In 1935 he travelled Japan, Korea, Manchuria Soviet land and Iran. In 1936, he visited Nepal and also visited Tibet third time. In 1938 he visited Tibet fourth time. In 1939 he left monkhood. In 1949 he wrote “Baudh Sanskriti”. In 1954, he edited “Dohakosh” of Sarahapad. In 1963 on 23rd March, he passed away.1

To enrich Buddhist literature he wrote “Buddhacharya” Dhammapada, Majjhim Nikaya (translation), Vinay Pitak (translation), Digha Nikaya (translation), Buddha Sanskriti, Baudh Darshan, Mahamanav Buddha, Tibet Mein Baudha Dharma.2

Rahulji did not believe in re-birth so he wanted to do more and more work during this life span. He liked these words of Buddha too much “monks! I propound Dhamma like a boat, this is to travel not to hold on”.3

Rahulji did not believe in God. He said that it is a synonym of ignorance.4 He did not believe in soul also.5

E:- ACHARYA NARENDRA DEV AND BUDDHISM

Acharya Narendra Dev was born at Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh in 1889. In 1902, he began his schooling. He passed B.A. from Allahabad and M.A. from Banaras. He passed L.L.B in 1915 and started law practice in Faijabad. In 1916, he organized Home Rule League Branch. He was appointed Vice President of Kashi Vidyapeeth and later its head, He remained active in the Congress Socialist Party and presided over it. In 1947, he was appointed Vice Chancellor of the Lucknow University. In 1956, he died at Penendural (Mدراس) and was cremated at Lucknow.

1. Swayambhu Mahapandit, Gunakar Mule, Page 267-268
2. Ibid, Page 272.
3. Algaddupam Sutta, Majjhim Nikaya, 1.3.2
Archarya Narendra Dev had high regards for Buddhist philosophy. While in M.A, along with learning the Pali language, we also had some knowledge of the Buddhist philosophy. After that we independently studied many books on Buddhist philosophy, while remaining at home, he had gone through all the books of Charavasky and Phunse. Phunse's world-renowned book ‘Basubandhu Brihat Abhidhamma Kosh’ was with commentary. Phunse had translated this book in French. This was not a mere translation. In this book the translator had given manifold Glimpses of his pedantry. Narendra Dev translated this book in English and later in Hindi. Only a portion of Hindi translation has been published. He had written many treatises on the Buddhist philosophy in Vidyapeeth Magazine. Besides this, he has also got published his various independent articles in many anthologies. All these articles have been published in his collections titled ‘Buddhist Philosophy’. Almost all the fundamentals of Buddhism religion and philosophy have been included in it. Only there was nothing on the subjects like ‘Aagam’ and ‘Tantra’. There was no information regarding ‘Mantrayuan’ originating from Mahayan, Kaal Chakra Yan, Vajrayan etc., which related to ‘Aagam’ principle.¹ He showed how technical terms of Buddhist Philosophy could be expressed in Urdu.²

His special subjects were Indology, Ancient Indian History and Modern India i.e. 19th and 20th centuries. He had special claim as rising Indologist. He did his M.A. in the Queen's College, Banaras, where he had a good fortune to learn Ancient Indian History and Culture under the guidance of the famous scholar, Dr. Venice. Acharyaji was a well versed scholar of Sanskrit and he perfected his Pali in Banaras under Dr. Venice. He was thoroughly grounded in Indology. He made a special study of Buddhism and its history. It is certain that had he chosen to continue in the field of scholarship, he would have emerged as a great scholar of Buddhism and Ancient India. Even though he did not continue in that line, he left an outstanding book on Buddhism, in Hindi which is a landmark in Hindi literature. It is an irony of fate that he completed the book under the stress of economic circumstances. Though he left Indology for other fields, his interest in it continued till the very end he was always trying to complete one or two other works that he had taken up long before. He had started work on a Prakrit grammar which was practically completed, but he wanted to be up-to-date and would not agree to its publication unless he could check up the latest research on the subject.

¹. His age and Ideals, Editor J.C. Dixit, Page 338-339.
². Ibid, Page 302.
As he became more engrossed in politics, he was never able to spare time and the work remained unpublished. His commentary on the Abhidharma-Kosha was probably completed in some parts.\textsuperscript{1}

He wrote the monumental book in Hindi on the philosophy of Buddhism in the Ahmadnagar Fort while in internment. Narendra Dev Ji was very gently attracted both by the personality of Buddha and his philosophy, and it can be safely said that it was Narendra Dev Ji who was responsible for Jawahar Lal’s leaning towards the Buddhist faith and the introduction of Buddhism in the congress and among congressmen.\textsuperscript{2}

Narendra Dev Ji said that we should not ignore the Buddhist writings. These works provide ample material for the history of Indian Sociology, and Buddhist scholars have made a special contribution in the development of logic, philosophy, grammar and poetry.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1} H:\textsuperscript{a} His age and Ideals, J.C. Dikshit, Page 301
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, Page 272-273.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid, Page 172.