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The year 1900 was an eventful year for the revival of Buddhism. In that year, two branches of the Maha Bodhi Society were opened at Madras and Kushinagar. In 1904, the famous Ashokan Pillar, the Lion Capital of which has been adopted as National Emblem, was discovered at Sarnath. A relic casket was discovered in 1917 from the only brick stupa of probable pre_Ashokan date at Piprahwa in pre_Ashokan Characters on this relic casket, the discovery of so many relics from different parts of India, the Buddhist heritage and culture were fully brought to light.

Inspired by Sir Arnold’s articles a young Ceylonese Buddhist of 29 years old, named Dharmapala had visited Sarnath in 1891.

Another illustrious personality Bodhanand became a Bhikshu in 1914 at the hands of Ven. Kripasaram Mahasthavir. Since at that time there was no consecrated sima in India for this purpose, the upasampada ceremony of Ven. Bodhananda was performed in a boat on the Ganges near Calcutta by the Bhikshu of Burma, Ceylon and Chittagong. Anagarika Dharmapala was also present on this occasion, on becoming a Bhikkhu, Ven. Bodhananda returned to Lucknow and made it the centre of his activities. Thereafter, in 1916, he established the Indian Buddhist Association ( Bhartiya Baudh Samiti). In 1925, he erected a beautiful Buddha Vihar in Risaldar Park Lucknow. As a result of the preaching of honourable Bodhananda Mahasthavir, a congenial atmosphere was created for the revival of Buddhism in North India, which give inspiration to many people of North India to adopt the Buddhist way of life.

In December, 1928, Shri. Shiv Charan Lal of Lucknow presided over an All India Buddhist Conference at Calcutta in the Mahabodhi Society Hall.

Of the many achievements of the Maha Bodhi society for the revival of Buddhism in India, we must mention the Herculean efforts made by Anagarika Dharma Pala to raise funds for constructing Dharmasla at the three holy places of Buddhist pilgrimage, Viz.; Buddha Gaya Sarnath and Kusinara and to secure lands and building materials for construction of the same.

2. Sangharakshita Bhikkhu, Anagarika Dharmapala, the Maha Bodhi Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, Calcutta (Page-34)
Anagarika Dharmapala

*With gratitude from Maha Bodhi Journal.*
SARNATH DHARMASALA:

In 1901, a plot of land was purchased by the Maha Bodhi Society at Sarnath with Rs. 600/- donated by Anagarika Dharmapal's mother, Smt. Mallika Hewawitarne. On this plot a small building was erected with the funds collected from a few Burmese friend an Englishman Mr. Sturdy, and Mudaliyar E.R. Goonaratne of Galle, Ceylon. An extension of the building was made with Rs. 1000/- contributed by the Maha Bodhi Society of Arakan, MRS. Foster contributed Rs. 1500/- to the Temple fund of Sarnath. The Dharmasala was completed in 1904 when the Anagarika returned from his American tour. He started the Banaras School of Arts and Agriculture in the Dharmasala and its maintenance charges were borne by MRS. Foster. This school was non-sectarian and was meant to train young children in such a way as to develop their latent individuality by means of natural education. In 1917 the Raja of Bhinga donated Rs. 2000/- to the society. This sum was utilized in purchasing ten bighas of land at Sarnath.

KUSINARA DHARMASALA:

A beautiful Dharmasala was erected at Kusinara under the supervision of Bhikshu Mahavira, who was able to collect RS. 13,000/- from Burma with the help of Maung Khee Zarhee.

HEAD QUARTER OF MAHA BODHI SOCIETY SHIFITED TO BANARAS:

In 1904, after the erection of the Rest House at Buddha Gaya and Sarnath, the Headquarters of Maha Bodhi Society was shifted from Calcutta to Banaras and Buddha Gaya, in the hope that more intensive work could be done by having the headquarters of the Society in the actual field of work, soon after, the transfer, the mistake was realized and Headquarters reverted to Calcutta.

1. Maha Bodhi Journal, January & February 1905 (Page 84)
Of the four places of pilgrimage recommended in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the first place was occupied by the Buddha Gaya, while the second place was Sarnath where Buddha delivered his first discourse after the attainment of Bodhi and made his first converts.

The Maha Bodhi Society purchased thirteen bighas of land at the second sacred site and the Government of India agreed to give a portion of Buddha’s relics if a suitable Vihara could be erected there. Some years before at the request of Anagarika Dharmapala MRs. Foster had contributed Rs. 17,000/- for the erection of mausoleum. This amount was placed in deposit and by 1931 had increased to almost Rs. 30,000/- which was utilized towards the construction of vihara.

When all preparations for the construction of the Vihara had proceeded apace, the Archaeological Department rose up from their slumber and wanted to acquire the site selected from the Vihara. After a good deal of trouble,¹ created by the Archaeological Department, the Society was offered a site, though smaller in area, were the foundation stone was laid by H.E. Sir Harcourt Butler, Governor of U.P., on the 3rd November 1922.

Soon after this ceremony it was decided to take up the revival of Sarnath in right earnest. Ven. K. Sirinivas became the resident monk, while Shri. D. Valisinha used to spend about ten days of the month in Calcutta and twenty at Sarnath. The Plan of the Vihara was first drawn up by Mr. Khanna of Banaras, who supervised the work until its completion and in this way he rendered valuable service to the society. After construction of the Vihara had been entrusted to a contractor and the work, which he had taken up without delay, had made some progress it was to Taxila to meet Sir. John Marshall, who gave him a sympathetic hearing. The dispute between the Archaeological Department and the society was settled in 1926 by the Government (I) agreeing to bear the cost incurred in connection with the foundation work and (II) offering a suitable plot of land for the Vihara.²

The Archaeological Department was generous enough to set a part nearly 20 acres of land and to agree to bear the cost for laying it out as a part, which would be an annexe to the Vihara, with suitable trees planted therein.¹

These negotiations were carried on jointly by Dr. Hewavitarne and Shri. D. Valisinha on behalf of the Maha Bodhi Society. However, in the absence of Anagarika Dharmapala the burden of actually getting the work done, fell on the shoulders of Sri. Valisinha. It was he who decided that the building should be of red stone, although in the original estimate provision was made only for brick. In 1928 he left for England as manager of the London Buddhist Mission and Mr. P.P. Siriwardene who acted in his place, painstakingly carried on the work. Shri. Valisinha returned to India in 1930 and saw the completion of the Vihara in 1931. After the final agreement the Archaeological Department the construction of the Vihara was entrusted to Mr. Munnalal Govila, whose tender of Rs. 95,000/- was accepted by Sarnath Vihara Committee Treasurer of which Shri. Shri. prakash, The Governor of Madras.² The account of the construction of the Vihara showed that Rs. 82,653.39 had already been spent up to the end of may 1930 as against Rs. 74,449/- the subscriptions collected including Rs. 30,000/- from Mrs. Foster and Rs. 10,000/- being the Compensation received from Government.³ The final cost came to about Rs. 120,000/-.³

The Vihara turned out to be a magnificent structure with ancient Buddhist architectural decorations carved on Indian red stone and the frescoes were painted by famous Japanese Artist. Through the ceaseless efforts of the Anagarika, a Vihara worthy of the name and fame of the place had come into being and it was now the duty of the Buddhists scattered pulsating with academic and religious life as it was two thousand to fifteen hundred years ago.

6. **SAMANERAS FROM CEYLON:**

In 1931 Ven. Dharmapal brought to Sarnath a batch of ten samaneras from Ceylon whom it was his intention to train for the task of propaogating the Dharma in India and he spared up pains to make them worth of their mission.⁴

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*With Gratitude from Buddhism in modern India by D.C. Ahir*
MULAGANDHA KUTI VIHARA OPENING CEREMONY:

The crowning and most glorious achievements of Anagarika Dharmapala’s life long sacrifices and struggles was the completion of the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara at Sarnath.

The construction of Mulagandha Kuti Vihara at Sarnath was taken up by Anagarika towards the end of his life, and for this he had also to cross many hurdles being able to accomplish it, because there were among the British administrators, a few exceptions only like H.E. Sir. Harcourt Butler and Sir John Marshall, who loved to see the progress of India in whatever sphere it might be (as well as workers) like Shri. D. Valisinha, P.P. Siriwardene, Ven. K. Sirinivasa, N. Nayaka Thera and helpers of the calibre of Dr. C.A. Hewavitarne) otherwise we could not think of an imperialistic Government agreeing not only to pay compensation for a mistake of one of their officials but also offering voluntarily a well laid out park to add to the scenic beauty of the magnificent Vihara.

Sarnath was no doubt, a rendezvous of ascetics in the Pre-Buddha days, but it was made famous by that great Teacher who tramped the whole way from Gaya to Banaras about 100 miles. It became the most favourite haunt of the Buddhist monks and continued to be so up to the days of king Harshavardhana. Then for centuries, it remained desolated and turned into a forgotten mass of ruins, till its buried treasures were discovered by the spade of the Archaeological Department. The works of the Department, being purely of scientific interest, appealed only to a few antiquarians and could not create a stir in the Buddhist world. It was the Anagarika who put in all his efforts and perhaps his last coin to rouse the Buddhists of Asia from their slumber and make them feel that they owed their faith to the Great Lord of Sarnath, Sakyamuni Buddha. Just for this achievement of Anagarika Dharmapala then leaving aside his innumerable other works in connection with the religion, every lover of Buddhist culture must bow down his head to the saintly architect of the Buddhist renaissance.

The opening ceremony of the Mulgandhakuti Vihara was celebrated on the 11th November 1931. At 2.15 p.m. the Director-General of Archaeology, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni as the representative of the H.E. Lord Willington, presented the bone relics of the Buddha to the Maha Bodhi Society with the following message of H.E. the Viceroy and Governor General of India: "It gives me great pleasure to be able to
Mr Devpriya Valisinghe who took over the responsibilities from Anagarika Dharmapala
present the Maha Bodhi Society certain well authenticated relics of the Sakya Sage, Gautam Buddha and it is a matter of deep gratification to me that they will be enshrined at a place where the Buddha preached his first sermon. I congratulated the society on having built a vihara worthy of the reception of these relics.” The relics were received this time not by the bare footed and almost bare bodies Sir Ashutosh, who had then departed from the earthy sphere, but by another son of Bengal, the Hon’ble Mr. Justice Manmatha Nath Mookerji, President of the Calcutta Maha Bodhi Society, Justice Mookerji handed over the relics to Mr. Rajah Hewavitarne, who carried them in a long procession, placing the casket containing the relics on the back of an elephant sent for the occasion by H.H. the Maharaja of Banaras. When the procession reached the Vihara the relics were received by Shri. Devpriya Valisinha who handed them over to the oldest monk present, viz; Angasara Mahasthavira of Chittagong. The casket of relics was at last deposited in a vault underneath the pedestal of the image.

At 3.45 p.m. a mass meeting was held presided over by the Ven. Shri. Ratnasara Mahanayaka Thera of Ceylon. The Hon’ble Raja Sir Moti Chand, as Chairman of the Reception Committee, delivered his speech welcoming the visitors. Then the messages sent by distinguished persons were read out, speeches were delivered by some of the members present and Anagarika Dharmapala delivered a stirring address. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru attended the meeting with his wife and sisters and presented on behalf of the working committee of the congress the National Flags as token of good will. The President then delivered his address in Pali.¹

On the day following (i.e. 12th November) were planted ceremoniously, three sapling of the Bodhi tree brought from Anuradhapura, and a convention was held under the presidency of Principal S.N. Das Gupta of the Calcutta Sanskrit College. On the 3rd day (i.e. 13th Nov.) were enshrined the holy relics and the images of Buddha received from various places after which a public meeting was held under the presidency of Mr. B. L. Broughten of the British Maha Bodhi Society.

In spite of his extremely Delecate health, the Anagarika now Ven. Devamitta Dharmapala worked for about a month to make the ceremony successful aided by his right hand untiring disciple Devapriya Valisinha,

1. Maha Bodhi Journal, 1931 (Pag-527)
The lifesize golden Image of Buddha in preaching posture is over the chamber containing real relics of Buddha's body.
who worked without any respite for nearly two months as well as by the samaneras and Mr. Sushil Guha Khasnabis. Many other persons including Shri. Rash Behari Roy, helped the Maha Bodhi Society to make the function as excellent as possible. There were 1,000 visitors of whom about 500 came from Tibet, Burma, Siam, Ceylon and other Buddhist countries.

The story of this Vihara does not end here. At the request of Shri. D. Valisinha, Mr. Broughten offered at the opening ceremony in 1931, Rs. 10,000/- as his donations for having the walls of the Vihara decorated with fresco paintings by a Japanese artist. Mr. Kostru Nosu and his assistant Mr. Kawai undertook the task and worked hard for three and half years. The remuneration offered to the artist was very small but he finished the work just for his love of art and his great regard for Buddha, notwithstanding his pecuniary loss.

This sacrifice and devotion will certainly be recompensed by the merit that had accrued on account of his services to the cause of Buddhism. A special function to declare open the frescoes of the Vihara was held on the 18th May, 1936 under the Presidentship of the famous Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya.

It is a matter of gratification that Japanese artist entered into the Indian spirit of painting and treated the scene and figures in true Indian style. The scene depicting the night of the great Renunciation really touches one’s heart, while the picture of Prince Siddhartha at the ploughing festival is charming.

Mr. Nosu and Mr. Kawai were given a ‘send off’ on the 13th September 1936 by the member of the society and the International Buddhist University Association. The frescoes of Buddha’s life painted by these Japanese artists at Sarnath strengthened further the Cultural link that united India with Japan.

On the 11th Nov., 1933, the second anniversary day of Sarnath Vihara, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru not only paid a visit to the shrine but also spoke a few words suited to the occasion.1

On the 16th January 1934 Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Willingdon, alongwith H.H. the Maharaja of Banaras visited the Vihara. According to the Indian custom their Excellencies put off their shoes and walked bare footed within the precincts of the Vihara, and expressed their admiration for its beautiful structure and moral paintings.1

In December 1935 the famous Japanese Poet Yone Noguchi went to Sarnath and stayed there with Mr. Nosu, the artist for three days. He spent most of his time in examining the ruins and writing his impressions. He showed great interest in the work of the Maha Bodhi Society.

On the 19th January, 1936 Their Excellencies Sir Harry Haig and Lady Haig, accompanied by the Commissioner of Banaras, Mr. Panna Lal, paid a visit to the Vihara and very much impressed by the edifice and its surroundings.

A week later came to Sarnath the highly venerated Lama of Tibet, Tumo Gashe Rampochhe, alongwith forty other Lamas, and sojourned at Sarnath for about a week. They were shown round the places of interest by Mr. Laden La, who took this opportunity to paint the image of Buddha in real gold.

On the 1st August 1936 their excellencies Sir Maurice Hallet and Lady Hallet, accompanied by their son and staff visited the Sarnath Vihara and appreciated the frescoes. His Holiness Tai Hsu, the renowned Chinese High Priest, visited the Vihara in 1933 accompanied by Prof. Ten Yun Shan, and after being taken in procession round Banaras was given an enthusiastic reception. His presence synchronised with the Ashoka day organized for the first time by the Maha Bodhi society, and both his Holiness Tai Hsu and Pandit Nehru addressed the mass meeting which was held on this occasion.

There are only a handful of names out of thousands, but it should be stated that the Vihara is visited by everyone who comes to Banaras, all of whom carry away golden impressions of the place. The Vihara has perhaps done more than any other agency for the renewal of Buddhism in India, and Anniversary celebrations which Shri. D. Valisinha has organized as a popular mela (fair) is now an outstanding feature of its activities.

In large monasteries there is always a holy spot technically known as “Sima” in which is performed the ceremony of ordination (Upasampada). In the Vinaya Pitaka there are elaborate rules for fixing the boundaries (sima) of this plot of land, and for this reason, it is designated “Sima”. On the 16th January 1933, plot of land about 50’X50’ marked by 8 stone pillars was dedicated to the Sangha for the purpose of ordination by the Anagarika. Ten saintly Bhikshus, headed by Ven. M. Siddhartha, Anunayak Thera of Mallwatte chapter, and the two Principals of the Vidyodaya and Pirivenas, who came from Ceylon, consecrated at spot according to the vinaya rules. Soon after the consecration of the sima the Anagarika was given the higher ordination (Upsampada) and was made a full fledged Bhikshu, having had his first ordination (Pabajja) on the 13th July 1931 at the Mulagandhakuti Vihara from Ven. B. Rewata Nayaka Thera.\(^1\) It should be mentioned that Mr. L. Koon Wa, the Society’s representative in Burma, had donated Rs. 5000/- for the construction of this Sima in memory of his mother.

9. **THE VIHAR LIBRARY:**

A modern Vihara cannot be regarded as complete unless it has attached to it a good library. The society constructed a library building, having one hall and four rooms with verandahs, at an estimated cost of Rs. 8000/- It began with the large collection of books presented by Raj Bahadur Pandit Sheo Narain, a devoted member of the Maha Bodhi Society.\(^2\)

In 1934 it received as a gift Mr. C.T. Strauss, collection of English and German works on Buddhism,\(^3\) while through the good offices of Prof. Tan Yun Shan a full set of the Chinese Tripitaka was also received.

10. **SARNATH DHARMASALA:**

In 1933 the Maha Bodhi Society circulated the proposal that each Buddhist country, viz; Japan, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, China, Tibet and Nepal should build a cottage at Rs. 7000/- each at Sarnath and maintain

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there two Bhikshus who would study Pali, Sanskrit and other languages and thus from a nucleus of the International Buddhist Institute. The above proposal of the society did not materialise, but still, the idea has not been given up.

Fortunately for the Buddhist pilgrims a multimillionaire family of India, consisting of very highly cultured members, the well known Birlas of Pilani, offered to build a spacious magnificent guest house at Sarnath and the foundation stone of the same was laid by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on the 28th December 1934. Seth Jugal Kishore Birla, at whose expense the Guest house was built, held the opinion that there was very little fundamental difference between Hinduism and Buddhism in ethical, philosophical and psychological principles and this fact impelled him to render service to Hinduism and Buddhism alike.

The Dharmasala or Guest House was formally opened by the Consul General of China Chang Lou, at a meeting held on the 10th January 1939 under the presidency of that famous scholar and cultural architect of India Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. The Palatial Dharmasala contained 32 rooms with necessary adjuncts and was built at a cost of more than half a lakh of rupees. The entire Dharmasala was given away by the Birlas to the Maha Bodhi Society, but its maintenance charges are borne by them. Shri. D. Valisinha, at whose request Birlas undertook the work, spent a good deal of his time supervising the construction, and in getting the building completed.

11. **CHINESE BUDDHIST TEMPLE AT SARNATH:**

On the 8 February 1939, the foundation stone of a Chinese Buddhist Temple at Sarnath was laid by Mr. Chih Tring Feng, Consul General for China, in the presence of a distinguished gathering. The main donor Mr. Lee Choon Seng, who contributed Rs. 60,000/- towards the expenses of its creation came from Singapore specially.¹

12. **INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST INSTITUTE, SARNATH:**

A meeting was held in Calcutta on the 7th December 1930 when Shri. D. Valisinha explained to the assemblage that the Anagarika all along cherished the idea of founding, on the lines of the Nalanda University, an institution where the young Samaneras and Bhikshus would be given not only education but also live the life of true monks,

and become fit and proper person to wander forth for the good of the many.

In accordance with that idea of the Anagarika a small beginning of the institute was made by sending to Sarnath Ven. H. Dharmloka. Thera and Ven. D. Sasanasiri. Thera as Acharyas, and group of ten Samaneras as pupils. This band of teachers and students brought new life into Sarnath. They had a small library, the gift of Pandit Sheo Narain of Lahore, and the classes were held regularly in the shade of trees. In 1932, Rev. Maruyama, a priest of Nichiren sect, joined the institute and studied Pali, Hindi and other subjects. ¹ For lack of adequate funds the institute could not be expended, and in 1939, there were only ten Samaneras who besides their studies rendered also service to the Maha Bodhi Society in many ways.

13. INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION:

The members of Dharmapala Memorial Committee proposed to form the International Buddhist University Association and it was registered in 1935 under the Societies Act. ² It would have been an academy with 75 orientalists as follows who were expected to deliver lectures on Buddhist Philosophy, Art, and Literature at different centers, besides which they would also edit and translate Buddhist texts. The Hon'ble Mr. N. Mukherji became its President with three secretaries and a General Secretary. Brahmacari Govinda (formerly E.K. Hoffman) became the first General Secretary, and the other three secretaries were Shri. D. Valisinha, Mr. P.K Das and Dr. B.C Sen. To popularize the idea of the University, Brahmacari Govinda went to Ceylon.

Brahmacari Govinda organized a series of lectures on Buddhistic subjects for delivery by different scholars under the auspices of this association. He also secured the cooperation of many distinguished European scholar. ³ Brahmacari Govinda himself delivered a course of 24 lectures at Sarnath during the winter season of 1935-36 ⁴ and 34 lectures in the winter of 1936-37. ⁵

This association organized language classes in Calcutta for teaching sinhalese, Burmese, Chinese, and Tibetan. ⁶

In Calcutta many scholars delivered lectures under the auspices of the Association. Sir U. Thwin sent a cheque of Rs. 500/- of which Rs. 100/- was the fee for his life-membership, and the balance of Rs. 400/- for the formation of a library. The Buddhist Institute of Comobia sent Rs. 400/-. The financial aspect of this institute was, however, not encouraging, so culturally backward are rich countrymen.

The society also began to maintain a school called the Maha Bodhi Vidhyalaya, which is aided by the U.P. Government, and a free Dispensary. Shri. D. Valisinha, the then General Secretary, was mainly responsible for starting and running these two institutions. Baba Raghve Das, the well-known congress leader of Gorakhpur, rendered him every assistance in starting the Vidyalaya, while Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, M.A who later on became Principal, went to Burma and Ceylon and collected some donations from charitably disposed persons. Shri. D. Valisinha, who had been given special authority by the founder to manage the legacy left by Mrs. Foster, utilised part of the fund for constructing the buildings, while Seth J.K. Birla generously donated the land.

A donation of Rs. 3000/- from the late Mr. Chan Chor Khine of Rangoon, enabled the General Secretary to start the free Dispensary, which was opened by Mr. Panna Lal, the commissioner of Banaras. At this dispensary about 25000 people annually receive treatment.

REST HOUSE AT KUSINARA:

In 1939 Seth J.K. Birla laid the Buddhists under further obligation by constructing another beautiful Rest House at Kusinara, spending over Rs. 30000/- for the purpose, while a Burmese devotee offered a “Sima” for the ecclesiastical ceremonies and the Government of U.P. granted an annual sum for the growth of a library under the supervision of the resident Bhikshu. Among the writers who played a prominent role in the revival movement, Rahul Sankrityayan wrote novels, stories, scientific, and philosophical books, travel records, biographies etc. He was a great explorer also. thrice he undertook the hazardous journey to Tibet and brought back valuable old manuscripts, some of which he himself edited and published Rahulji’s efforts to fill the long felt need of Buddhist literature in Hindi, the national language of India, were supplemented by

his worthy colleagues, namely, Ven Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan and Ven. Jagdish Kashyap.\(^1\)

By 1947, the revival movement had come a long way and was well entrenched. But the Buddhists were still a small fry in a big ocean as till then it had not become a mass movement. Since independence the name of the Maha Bodhi society has been changed to the Maha Bodhi Society of India.\(^2\)

15. **MASS MOVEMENT:**

After independence, the revival movement took a new turn as Buddhism came to be associated with nationalism and ancient Indian culture. When the constituent Assembly was busy with drafting a constitution for free India, the question of National Flag and the National Emblem baffled the constitution makers. Their eyes ultimately turned towards the Buddhist heritage which represented the glorious days of India under the aegis of the Buddhist Kings. Thanks to the wisdom of the constituent Assembly, of which President was Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Buddhist wheel of law and the lion capital of Ashok were adopted as ‘National symbols’ of free India. The inspiring personality behind the adoption of these symbols of Buddhist culture as ‘National Symbols’ was none else but Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who was the Chairman of the committee which drafted the constitution.

In 1950, the revival movement took another favourable turn. Hitherto, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was only known as an acknowledged leader of the as Scheduled Castes, the downtrodden masses, as he had confined his attention to their economic, special and political problems only. But in 1950 he made known publicly his determination to revive Buddhism in India.\(^3\)

In that year, he asked his followers to celebrate the Buddha Jayanti, in future every year. Same year, he contributed an article to the vaisakha Number of the Maha Bodhi journal under the *The Buddha and the Future of His Religion* concluding which he said that Buddhism was the only religion which the world could have because of it’s emphasis on reason, modality, liberty, equality and fraternity.

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Another important event in the post-Independence era which focussed the attention of the Indian masses on the Buddha Dhamma was the restoration of the sacred relics of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, namely Sariputta and Mahamoggallana at their original resting place.

The celebrations of the home coming of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana were concluded with a grand function at Sanchi in November 1952 which was attended by the Prime Minister of India and Burma, world Buddhist leaders and venerable Bhikkhus. Concluding his speech Prime Minister Nehru said, "Out of this conference seed will bloom and spread happiness." Thus the Sanchi celebrations opened a new vista for the revival of Buddhism in India.

The year 1956 marked a milestone in the chequered history of Buddhism. In that year, the Buddhist era, which commenced on the day of the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha, completed 2500 years. This historic event was celebrated with great enthusiasm throughout the Buddhist world. The Buddha Jayanti celebration of 1956 undoubtedly marked the beginning of a New Era, an era of hope peace and prosperity for Buddhism. This is particularly true about India. To celebrate the historic Buddha Purnima in a befitting manner, the Government of India appointed the Buddha Jayanti celebration committee headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Vice President of India. One member of this committee was Dr. Sampurnanand, Chief Minister of U.P. others were Dr. Shri. Krishna Sinha, Chief Minister of Bihar, Shri. S.D. Sharma, Chief Minister of Assam, Ven. Kushak Bakula, Head Lama of Ladakh, and the Maharaj kumar of Sikkim. Shri J.L. Nehru, Prime Minister, who originally belonged to Uttar Pradesh, was an associate member. The Buddha Jayanti celebrations lasted for full one year i.e. up to May 1957.

The Maha Buddha Jayanti celebration commenced with a message of Dr. Rajendra Prasad who said "on this auspicious occasion of the 2500th anniversary of Lord Buddha, I send greetings to my countrymen and indeed to every citizen of the world. It is a solemn day for all those who believe in the supremacy of virtue and the superiority of human spirit over things mundane and ephemeral. People of the land, where he underwent a process of rigorous penance in search of truth and where he preached the gospel of absolute tolerance and universal peace, are bound to experience joy on this occasion."
During the course of the year long celebration, thousands of religious and cultural function were held and millions of pages were written in praise of the Buddha as almost all the daily newspapers and periodical journals in the country brought out special supplements devoted to the Buddha and Buddhism. In addition, hundreds of books and pamphlets were published in various languages of India. The All India Radio throughout the year broadcast a number of features, talks and dramas on Buddhism. Two Hindi feature films i.e. Anjali and Angulimala, based on the Buddhist history were also produced in connection with 2500th anniversary of Buddhism. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar arranged the production of two Gramophone records, through the H.M.V company in Pali relating to Trisarana, Panchsheel etc. The celebrations at the Buddhist shrines, which were generally organized by the Maha Bodhi society were more solemn and religious in character. As was natural, on the 2500th celebrations at the Buddhist shrines in India got a face-lift. They were restored, repaired and renovated by the Government with a view to making the visit of the large number of Buddhist pilgrims from India and abroad more comfortable. Approach roads to these centers were repaired; rest houses and canteens were constructed; and gardens were laid out. Thus the entire country during the Maha Jayanti year was swept by the Buddha-spirit.¹

The most outstanding event of the 25th Buddha Jayanti celebrations took place on 14th of October 1956. On that day, Dr. Ambedkar took formal refuge in Buddha-Dhamma, along with half a million followers, at an impressive and historic ceremony held at Nagpur and gave a clarion call to his followers to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha with the turning of the wheel of law by Dr. Ambedkar at Nagpur on 14th October 1956, the revival movement entered into an era of intense activity which can be rightly called the ‘Ambedkar Era’ of Indian Buddhism. It is worth noting that within a period of five years (1956–1961) the population of Buddhists registered a spectacular increase of 1670.71% i.e. from 1,80,832 it rose to 32,50,227. In 1964-65, the Maha Bodhi Society of India celebrated the Anagarika Dharmapala’s birth centenary. During the year long celebrations, a number of functions were held throughout the country in honour of the pioneer Dharmaduta. The most impressive celebration were those held at Calcutta, New Delhi and Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh. A Bo-sapling was planted on the 25th October 1964 in the Buddha Jayanti park by Lal Bhadur Shastri, Prime Minister of India.

¹. Buddhism in Modern India, D.C. Ahir, Page – 37.
A view of a session of the 7th Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists held at Sarnath in Nov.-Dec., 1964.

*With Gratitude from Buddhism in Modern India by D.C. Ahir.*
The sapling, which was brought by Mrs. Shrimavo Bandarnaike, Prime Minister of Ceylon, from the Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura, was planted amidst the chanting of sacred sutars in the presence of distinguished and colourful gathering.

It may be noted that about 2300 years ago, Princess Sanghamitra (Ashoka’s Daughter) had taken a sapling from the original Bo tree at Bodh Gaya to Anuradhapura. Immediately after the planting ceremony, a public meeting was held in the premises of the Buddha Vihara on Mandir Marg, New Delhi, under the presidency of Lal Bhadur Shastri. Mrs. Bandarnaike, Prime Minister of Ceylon, was the chief guest. Referring to the planting of the Bodhi-sapling in the Buddha Jayanti park, Shri. Shastri said that every Indian regarded the tree as sacred and would draw impression from it. He further said, “When the Bodhi sapling grew into a tree, it would be a symbol of Buddha’s lofty philosophy”. The Bodhi tree in the Buddha Jayanti park is growing steadily. Because of its sanctity it has already become an object of veneration for the Buddhist who visit it on the Buddha-Purnima and other sacred days.

In November-December 1964, India was once again swept by the Buddha-spirit. The occasion was provided by the seventh conference of the world fellowship of Buddhists which was held at Sarnath, the holy Isipatana, from November 29 to December. This being the first conference of the W.F.B. to be held in India, the Indian Buddhists were naturally excited and they came in full strength to meet, and exchange idea with their brethren from lands out of 68 delegates and 75 observers drawn from 23 countries, the Indian delegation was the largest. They came from Assam, Delhi, Kashmir(Ladakh), Madras, Maharashtra, Mysore, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The conference was inaugurated by Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, President of India, on the evening of 29th November. Among the notable personalities present were, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, His Highness, the Maharaja of Sikkim, Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani, Chief Minister of U.P. the Maharaja of Varanasi (Banaras) Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, Mayor of Varanasi, Diplomats and a number of high ranking Mahatheras. A significant feature of the conference who came in thousands from all parts of India. The inaugural address of Dr. Radhakrishnan was the best speech on Buddhism heard in recent times. It was held by one and all for sublimity of thought and nobility of sentiment concluding the illustrious philosopher – President of India exhorted the audience “to follow sincerely the teaching of the great master not merely, in letter, but in spirit” The thanks giving speech was delivered by Dr. G. P. Malal Sekara of Ceylon due to an end on 4th
December with the closing address of the President of the W.F.B. Her Serene Highness Princess Poon Pisml Diskul of Thailand. Though most of the Buddhist ancient sites were discovered and excavated during the pre-independence days, the post independence period from 1947 onwards has also claimed some notable discoveries. To quote a few; at Kausambi capital city during the time of the Buddha, inscriptional evidence has been found identifying the spot, Ghositaram, here the Buddha had stayed during his visit to that palce at the invitation of King udyan. Ahraura in Uttar Pradesh and Bairanja (Etah) are also places of Buddhist importance. Further the place where the Buddha had delivered the famous Kala-
Sutta has been discovered. This discovery made in 1969 by honorable Dharmarakshita of Sarnath. He has identified the village Kadwar, on the river Gomati, about 10 miles to the north of Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh, as the well known Kesaputta of the Kalamar.

Maha Bodhi Society of India, Buddha Dharma Sangha, Ancient Buddhist Society and Sankissa Mission have been working sincerely to spread the message of Buddha.


On 14th and 15th February, 1981, Buddhist representatives from 25 districts participated in the 1st state conference of Bhartiya Baudhda Mahasabha at Aitmadiur, Agra. Second state conference of Bhartiya Baudhda Mahasabha was held on 21-22 February, 1982 at Townhall Shahjahanpur where, representatives from 35 districts participated. Third state conference of Bhartiya Baudhda Mahasabha was held on 9-10th November, 1985 at Narayani, Dharmshala, Kanpur. Ven Bhante S. Rinpone was the Chief Guest in this conference. The 4th state conference of Bhartiya Baudhda Mahasabha U.P. was held on 9th and 10th March, 1991 at Ishwari Prasad Dharmashala, Lucknow, where Ven. Bhante Lama Lobjang was the chief Guest. The 5th state conference of Bhartiya Baudhda Mahasabha U.P. was held on 12th and 13th September,
1993 at Dr. Ambedkar Higher Secondary School, Tejgarhi Road Meerut. Ven Bhante Dhamma Viriyō was the Chief Guest.

In 1989, a bill was passed by the Parliament according to which the SC/ST candidates could retain the reservation in services after conversion to Buddhism. It became possible due to the efforts of Ram Vilas Paswan, the then Union Minister in V.P. Singh’s Council of Ministers.

In 1989, a conference for conversion to Buddhism was held at Agra, organized by Shri. Gulab Sehra.

In 1990, during the birth centenary year, Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Mahasabha started its innovative programmes at Lucknow as well as at other districts. Seminars on the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar and Lord Buddha were organized at many places.

On 6\textsuperscript{th} November, 1994, 10,000 people embraced Buddhism at Motibag Bhulandshahr in the presence of Ven. Bhante Vira Vilang Dhammavara (Ex-Ambassador, Cambodia).

On 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} November 1994, 200 persons embraced Buddhism in the presence of Ven. Bhante Dhamma Priya. Besides these conversion conferences, many conferences have been held at Agra, Merrut, Farrukhabad, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Ghazipur etc.

On 9\textsuperscript{th} December, 1994 ‘Buddha Milan Samaroh’ was held at Birla Dharmsala, Sarnath.

On 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} November, 1994 Ven. Bhante D. Revat Mahathera organized an ‘\textit{All India Bhikshu Conference}’.

During the 4\textsuperscript{th} state conference of Bhartiya Baudhika Mahasabha a seminar was organized on the problems of the Buddhists which was attended by Ven. Bhante Lama Lobjhang, Ven. Bhante Dhamma Viriyō, Shri. Rama Pati Shastri the then Samaj Kalyan Minister of U.P, Shankaranad Shastri, Motiram Shastri, Dr. Dauji Gupta, R.D. Sonkar, Dr. A. Lal, Dr. D.S. Ashok, Rajkumar alias B.P. Ashok and Ven. Bhante G. Pragyanand.

Buddhist monks in the Kesar Bagh Buddhist conference on 13th Oct; 1995

Buddhist people attending the Kesar Bagh Buddhist conference.

* With Gratitude from Prerna Punj, Editor M.S.Gautam.
The Buddhists of U.P. have been fighting for the emancipation of Gaya. Under the leadership of Ven. Bhante Arya Nagarjun Surai Sasai, about three thousand upasakas and upasikas from 24 districts supported the movement for the liberation of Gaya.

Chinese Buddhist Mission was welcomed during the period between 30th January, and 26th February 1994 at Sarnath, Varansi, Sravasti and Lucknow.

On 30th May, 1994, 3000 people embraced Buddhism at Muslim Inter College complex in Bijnor in the presence of Ven. Bhadant Dhamma Viriyo Mahathera.1

A Buddhist monks' conference was held at Kesar Bagh, Lucknow on 13th Oct. 1995.

Bhartiya Baudhtha Mahasabha U.P. has established Bodhisattva Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Sanskritik Evam Shaikshik Sansthan at Ibrahimpur Junaidpur alias Maujpur, Khurja, Bulandshahr on 7th April, 1996.

16. AMBEDKAR UDHYAN:

In 1995, during the first regime Ms. Mayawati founded Dr. Ambedkar Udyayan and on the second day of her second regime she ordered the Lucknow Development Authority again to complete it within 6 months. Dr. Ambedkar Udyayan comprises an area of 28 acres worth 40 crores.2

Inside the Udyayan 8 marble statues of elephants, 5 bronze statues (12 feet in height each) of Dr. Ambedkar, 1 statue of Lord Buddha are to be installed.

A VIP Guest House worth 5 crores of rupees near the Udyayan has also been established after the name of Dr. Ambedkar in an area of 15 acres. Dr. Ambedkar hostels worth 3 crores of rupees are also to be established in 12 districts. Dr. Ambedkar IAS and PCS coaching centres worth 1 crore of rupees have been under construction at Aligarh, Agra and Varansi districts. An award viz; Dr. Ambedkar Gaurav Samman of 1.25 lakh will be given annually. 11000 villages of state have been declared as Dr. Ambedkar villages. 350 crores of rupees will be spent for the development of these villages.3

1. Prema Punj, Page 17, Editor, M.S. Gautam, Published from Bulandshahr.
3. Page 21, Ibid.
Modipuram (Meerut) conference on 21st Nov., 97
organised by Vishwa Baudhha Sanskriti Pratishthan.

*With gratitude from Danik Jagran, Meerut 22nd November, 97.*
In 1997 three days (from 21st Nov. to 23rd Nov.) World Buddhist Conference was held at Modipuram, Meerut by Vishwa Baudhha Sanskriti Pratishthan. President of Vishwa Baudhha Sanskriti Pratishthan, Dr. B.K Modi welcomed the guests. Religious preachers of India and Japan emphasized upon the world peace and unity in Buddhists, Shinto and Hindu religion. They claimed that the unity of the three religions can defer the third world war and maintain peace and non-violence. Shankaracharya Jagadguru Shri. Kanchi Kamkoti Peetham said that such type of conferences increases closeness. Professor S. Rinponche appreciated this conference.

He said that there had been great development in science and technology but this is not the real development. He drew attention towards the population explosion, Hiroshima-Nagasaki disaster and environmental problems. He said that India was the teacher of the world. Now the time again demands that India should discharge her duties. He appealed the saints of India that they should save the existence of the world. He warned that if we do not live according to the path shown by Lord Buddha the world will not be saved from disaster.

The Chief Priest of Dhaikoji temple of Japan and Professor Dein. S. Uchida said that this conference will increase the unity among Asian religions.

Buddhist religious Preacher Gyan Jagat expressed his pleasure at the co-ordination between Hinduism and Buddhism. Japanese representative of Shintoism Haru Octo read a poem written by Late Japanese Emperor.¹

President of Jiyun International Foundation and Professor of National University of Shri. Lanka. Professor Jiyun Okai said that at present there is great decline in the religious. Rajendra Singh (Raju Bhaiyya), Ashok Singhal also participated.²

Shri. Rajendra Singh Pankaj Organising Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad told that Buddhism is a part of Hindu religion.³

Inauguration of Buddha Mahotsava '98
by President Mr. K.R. Narayana on 5th Nov '98

*With Gratitude from Ashok Khanna, Dainik Jagran, LKW 6th Nov '98*
On 5th Nov'98 President K.R. Narayanan inaugurated the international seminar at Sarnath on World Unity in Buddhist Triratna. He described the relevance of middle path propounded by Lord Buddha. He said that the middle path is essential for individual life, social relations, political and international relations. He emphasised that Buddhism was never spread through violence. He gave the example of Gandhiji that he adopted the principle of Buddha's non violence and struggled for the liberty of India. He appreciated the efforts of U.P. Government for tourism development. He saluted the land of Sarnath where the enlightened gave his first sermon. On this occasion Mr. Kalyan Singh, the Chief Minister of U.P declared that his Government is determined for the development of Buddhist centres. Shri. Kalyan Singh told that in the first phase 77 crores of rupees would be spent for the development of Buddhist centres and in the second phase 220 crores of rupees would be spent for the construction of Baudhha Paripath.

On this occasion Shri. Madan Lal Khurana union parliamentary works and Tourism Minister, Union Minister of State for Tourism Oman Apang, Tourism Minister of U.P Government Shri. Kalraj Mishra, General Secretary of Mahabodhi Society of India Bhikkhu Dr. D. Revat Maha Thero, Director Central Tibetan Higher Studies Institute Professor S. Rinponche, Chairman TRIFED Bhikshu Dhamma Viriya, Vice Chancellor BHU, Professor Y.C. Simhadri, Acharya Satya Narayan Goenka, Member of Parliament and S.P. Jaiswal were among the dignitaries.

On this occasion the main points of discussion were
1. Thoughts on Buddhists approach of Triratna and Maitri with reference to world peace
2. Evaluation of Buddhism as a catalyst for the formation of national culture
3. Debate on Buddhist intellectual tourists and Buddhist universality
4. Critical analysis of social unity in Buddhist and various societies
5. Analysis of the contribution of Buddhism in art and sculpture

FIVE THOUSAND HINDUS EMBRACE BUDDHISM:

On 14th February 1999, 5000 Hindus renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism under the guidance of Bhante G. Pragyanand. These Hindus belonged to Kurmi and Maurya castes which have been listed in Other Backward Classes. Srilankan High Commissioner, Prasad Arya Vasham who was special guest on this eve explained the main principles of Buddhism. On this eve, Dr. Sone Lal Patel explained why Buddhism was needed for a dynamic society. Shri. Balihari Patel, also participated in the programme. Dr. Ram Asre Kushwaha, Minister of State in U.P. govt also joined the programme, A magazine Tathagat Buddha Ki Nagri Saket published by Gautam Buddha Sansthan Saket was also released on this occasion.¹

In 1901 according to the census of 1901, only 768 Buddhists were there in the entire state, but according to the census of 1991, there are, more than 221433 Buddhists in U.P.²

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2. See, Census of India, 1901 and Census of India 1991.
The Sangha of Buddhism has two kinds of disciples-monks (Bhikshu) and lay worshippers (Upasakas); the former are organized into the Sangha or congregation, the number of which has swollen with the spread of Buddhism. The membership of the Sangha or the Religious order is open to all persons, male or female, above fifteen years of age and free from leprosy, consumption and other infectious diseases. Persons who are in government services or in private job, or who are in debt or have been branded as criminals are refused admission into the Sangha. But exceptions are in the case of convicts or persons with bodily deformities. There are no caste or religious restrictions. Thus, the Sangha forms a community of persons who are physically and morally fit to perform the noble service. Now a days it is not a thoroughly organised Sangha but it has been a powerful means of the spread of Buddhism. It plays a significant role in preserving and propagating the doctrines of Buddha. One of the primary causes of the rapid progress of Buddhism is the devoted and selfless services of the organisations founded by Anagarika Dharmapala, Bhadant Bodhananda, Bhante Gyan Prabhadar, Bhadant Prajnanand in Uttar Pradesh besides Ceylonese, Tibetan, Burmese, Thai monks.

1. The lay Buddhists, specially Scheduled caste and Backward class officers have financially contributed to the maintenance of Buddha Viharas. There is no centralised order in the name of country or state to spread Buddhism but some monks reside at a particular centre generally and work according to the guidance of the head of the centre or Buddha Vihara. Such centres provide accommodation to the monks for carrying on their studies and meditation. Lucknow, Sarnath, Agra, Kusinagar, Sravasti have developed into academic centres for producing talented monks, well grounded in religion and philosophy to propagate the teachings of Lord Buddha. Many Sabhas and Mahasabhas exist in Uttar Pradesh instead of the centralised Sangha for training missionaries. During 80s and 90s strife between the Ceylonese and Indian monks was noticed1.

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1 Interview with Dr. A.Lal Vice-Chancellor R.M.L Avadh University at Lucknow on 05.05.95