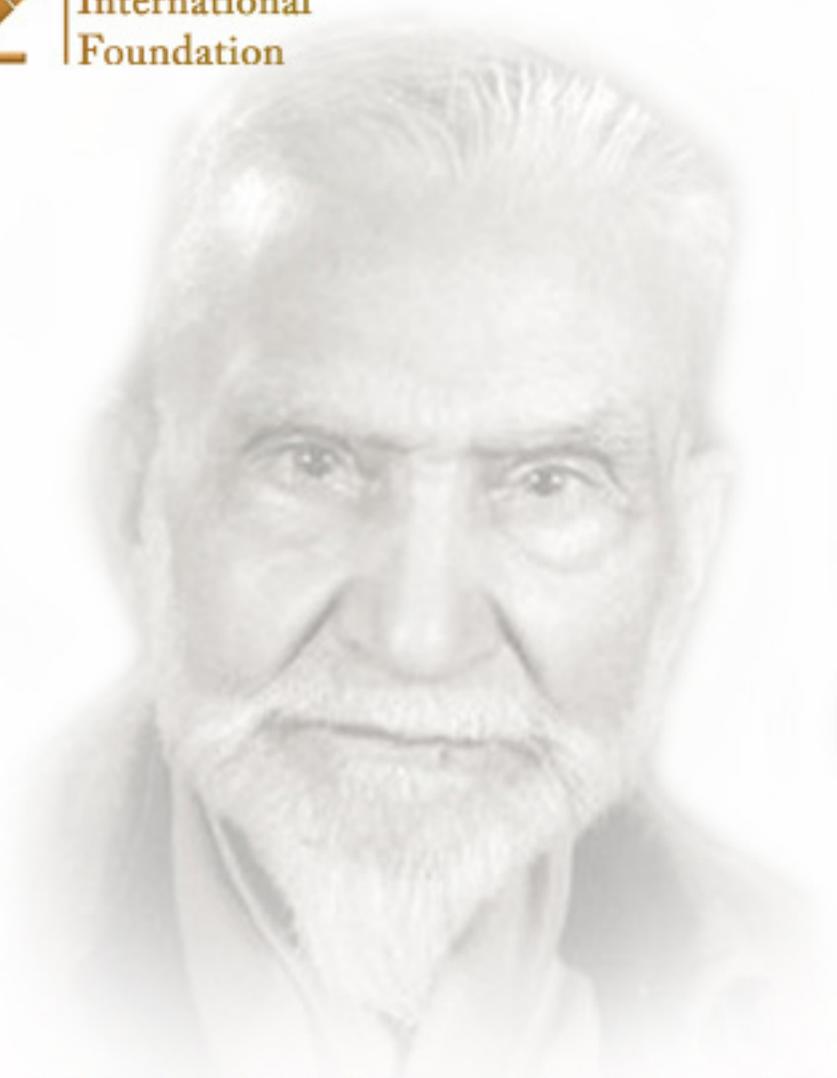




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# RAJA MAHENDRA PRATAP SINGH

A VISIONARY IGNORED BY HISTORY

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## **Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh: A Visionary Ignored by History**

**O**n 14 September 2021 Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a journey to Aligarh to lay foundation stone for a State University being established in the name of Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh in the village of Lodha in the Kol Tehsil near Aligarh. It is not usual for a Prime Minister to go and lay foundation stone for a state University but the decision to visit Aligarh at this juncture was significant for Modi and the Yogi in view of the ongoing *Kisan andolan* in which a large chunk of Jat farmers of Western U P were participating. Therefore, most observers have focused on the political motives of the event to placate Jat community of the region in the wake of impending assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. That may be so, and it is the privilege of a political party to organise and encash events to enhance its political capital. The significance of the event in the political calculus is reflected by the fact that the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath personally supervised the preparations to ensure due political impact. It is said that nearly 1000 buses were pressed into service to draw maximum crowd.

It is important to note that the decision to set up a University in the name of the Raja was announced by the Yogi government on 14 September 2019<sup>(1)</sup>. It happened when a controversy arose during the proposed birth anniversary

celebrations of the Raja wherein the B J P members demanded the Aligarh Muslim University to be renamed after him. This demand actually arose in the wake of a controversy that occurred due to the presence of Jinnah's portrait in the central hall of the University. It was pointed out that while the creator of Pakistan has been accorded a place of honour in the University but the person on whose land the University stands today has not been given due credit. Raja Ghansham Singh Bahadur, the father of Mahendra Pratap Singh was a close friend of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and when the latter planned to set up an institution *Muhammadan Anglo Oriental* (M A O) College in 1875 the Raja Bahadur donated a piece of land and later Mahendra Pratap donated Tikona Park for the purpose.

Public announcement of Modi's decision to lay a foundation stone for the University aroused exceptional curiosity in the life of Raja Mahendra Pratap. Nearly for a week the Internet went into tizzy where Raja remained among top five searches continuously. In order to appreciate the significance of this event and the importance of the Raja it may be useful to recapitulate the dimension of Raja's contributions to the nation during the freedom struggle and later.

### **Benevolent Visionary**

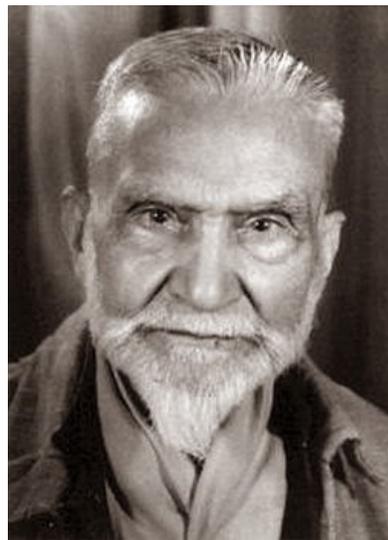
Raja was a man of exceptional vision, valour and virtuosity who traversed the horizons of international revolutionary movement around the world. Wikipedia introduces him as "a freedom fighter, journalist, writer, revolutionary and a social reformer known as Aryan Peshwa."<sup>(2)</sup> Typically molded in the Vedic ideals of *Vasudhaiva Kutmbakam* (the World is a Family) he visualized the inevitable demise of imperialist world order that he strived to replace by a benevolent structure of world governance. He discarded with disdain the notion of nation states that he felt was a source of exploitation, inequity, discrimination and injustice among nations. He sincerely embraced a civilisational worldview consisting of a cooperative conglomeration of cultures and civilisations. His *World Federation* consisted of civilisational units that appeared in the course of human evolution and functioned on the principle of self-governance. In his Pan-Asianist view, resurgence of Asia

formed an indispensable part for the emergence of a civilisational unit that he called *Aryan* essentially corresponding to the cultural sphere of Brahmanical Buddha. It is in this context that he saw the Indian independence as the natural corollary.

Representing and preserving diversity was central to his concept of world governance based on peace, freedom and security. Born into a Hindu family, married to a Sikh bride, studying and growing in the Islamic institution and pursuing his revolutionary enterprise in the Christian world he was an epitome of diversity. He was well versed in eight different languages and practiced different religions. Raja Mahendra Pratap lived his life with the ideals he preached. Immersed in the spirit of nationalism as a young student at the M A O college he acquired deep understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the country under the British imperial rule through his extensive travels around the Indian Empire of Britain.

## Early Life

Born on December 1, 1886 as Kharak Singh, he was the third son of Raja Ghansham Singh Bahadur of Al Mursan in the erstwhile United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, now in district Hathras of Uttar Pradesh. The Estate and the title of Raja Bahadur were bestowed upon his family by the Mughal emperors but later expanding British power in India divested the family of any political power and reduced territorial limits of the estate. When he was only three years old he was adopted by Raja Harnarain Singh Sahib of Hathras who renamed him as Mahendra Pratap Singh. In 1818 his grandfather was also dispossessed by the British of large part of his estate and was forced to live



Raja Mahendra Pratap

in his palace at Vrindavan. With such a background, it is little wonder that Mahendra Pratap would ultimately devote his life to ending British rule in India.

His early initiation into education occurred through home tutors first of whom was Maulvi Niaz Ali who gave him basic knowledge of Urdu and Persian and then Pundit Bhagwan Das taught Hindi, Sanskrit and some basic principles of Vedic philosophy. After this grounding in secular education he was then admitted to a Government school but later shifted to the M A O college in 1895, where he lived in a princely life style with ten servants. Early in his age while he was still a student he was married at Sangrur to the Princess Balbir Kaur, the younger sister of Maharaja Ranbir Singh a Sikh Jat Raja of Jind State in Haryana (then Punjab) thus got connected to *Phulkian* States of Punjab province.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of intense political ferment with renaissance in the social and cultural sphere and the call for *swadesi and swaraj* in political arena. M A O College was a hub of revolutionary activities where the staff and the students attempted to link the Indian freedom struggle with Pan-Islamic movement in Turkey, Afghanistan, and the Arab world. With anti-colonial sentiments already in his mind Mahendra Pratap actively participated in political debates and discussions that sharpened his understanding of the independence struggle and the Congress leadership. Surging nationalistic spirit prompted him to participate in the Indian National Congress session held in Calcutta in 1906 despite opposition from his father-in-law. There the speeches of Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Gaikwad of Baroda profoundly impacted his intellectual perspectives. Tilak's emphasis on education and Dadabhai Naoroji's thesis of self reliance through promotion of small industries with indigenous goods and local artisans impressed him to prepare his future agenda. The call for *swadesi* had a profound impact on him so upon his return he burnt all his imported possessions even while the Rani held on to her precious possessions. In those days, not many Princely states were willing to challenge the British authority but Mahendra Pratap lost interest in material comforts of royal living. Struggle for India's freedom became Raja's credo.

## Awakening

In 1907 Mahendra Pratap received control of his estate and left college without graduation. Lessons learnt from speeches of leaders at the Congress session in Calcutta on nationalism, swadeshi, and empowerment for economic self reliance deeply impacted his thinking. Hence the education as means of social change and struggle for independence came to occupy uppermost position in his mind. He realised the importance of ingenious functional education for practical application geared to contemporary needs and nationalism. He established country's first polytechnic college that was named as "PREM MAHA VIDYALAYA" the foundation ceremony of which was attended by Pt Madan Mohan Malviya. <sup>(3)</sup> His own residence at the Vrindavan palace was donated to establish the college along with four villages Wagaon, Baral, Sukhia and Akhtyarpur <sup>(4)</sup> to support the college. This was his dream project to be developed as a model institution. With a view to introduce state-of-the-art quality education he visited a number of technical institutions in Europe and the United States in 1911 to learn the modern techniques and introduced various skill oriented courses relevant for contemporary needs. Because of British attitude towards his family possessions seeds of resentment against British Empire had already been sown in his mind.

Fired by the desire to plunge into the freedom struggle he felt the need to strengthen his understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the people and the political climate in the country. He utilised his summer vacations in college to travel around every nook and corner of the country to enrich his socio-political perspectives. Throughout his journeys he saw the people living in penury suffering under the exploitative British administration; society mired in superstitions, caste discrimination, untouchability and the oppression of religious dogmatism. He wrote in his memoirs about one of his experiences in a temple in Dwarka. While he was the guest of Maharaja of Baroda he decided to visit a temple in Dwarka where the priest asked him about his caste. He answered himself to be a *Bhangi* (scavenger) and the priest stopped him from entering the temple premises. Later when the priests came to know of his true identity and that he was the guest of the Maharaja they came to apologise and invited him to visit the temple. But he refused saying,

*'how can I go to a place which does not respect its own people.'*<sup>(5)</sup> This experience not only strengthened his resolve to dedicate himself to the freedom struggle but also became the source of his social reform agenda that he pursued all his life. His encounter with different religions convinced him of underlying religious dogmatism to be the source of social discord and discrimination. Yet through his deep insight he gained the essence of religion as love, tolerance and virtuosity that he later translated into his own "Religion of Love".

Man of considerable means he decided to take a world tour in 1907 along with his wife during which he visited almost all the major cities of Europe, the United States and Japan. Many of these were important centres of international revolutionary movement frequented by traveling revolutionaries from around the world. There he interacted with members of Ghadar party in the U S. made friends with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya in Europe who was also working on his plans to drive British out of India through armed revolution. Experiences of his trip proved crucial in the formation of his individual perspective on the future course of action. Above all he realized the value of liberal education, liberty, equality, science and technology, women's education as essential ingredients of national development. He also found that all over the world the British colonial rule was an object of disdain that presented before him the prospects of building a united force in support of Indian independence.

Upon his return to India he again attended the Indian National Congress session at Allahabad in 1910 and as a member of the reception committee he got the opportunity to interact with all stalwarts of the political movement. There he organised a special All India Conference on Education which won the adulation of the prominent leaders. In the congress exhibition the articles made by the students of *PREM MAHA VIDYALAYA* were highly appreciated and the students won Prizes. Later in 1914 he published the Hindi translation of Presidential addresses of all congress sessions. Many of the nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malviya, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Dr. Sampooranand and many others visited his institution and were impressed by the functioning of Prem Maha Vidyalaya.<sup>(6)</sup>

He had special attachment with his alma mater M A O College and maintained close links throughout his life. In 1911 when a group of students under the leadership of Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari planned to visit Turkey to offer their services during the Balkan war, Mahendra Pratap also joined the team. In 1912 he sought Gokhale's blessings for going to South Africa and help Mahatma Gandhi in his campaign against British colonialism. Gokhale advised him not to go there but he accepted an offering of one thousand rupees from the Raja. Determined as he was Raja traveled to South Africa. His involvement in Gandhian campaign convinced him of the ideals of racial equality and antiracism became an integral part of his anti-imperialist agenda.

### **Idealism and Social Reforms**

His participation in Congress's struggle for freedom, travel around the country and his international experiences kindled a kind of secular nationalist consciousness that shaped his transformative social agenda. He espoused a sacred civilisational world view with equality of mankind, nations and individuals. His belief in the power of reformation was located in the context of renaissance that he witnessed during his trip to Calcutta and other parts of the country. Through his movement he advocated the equality of all human beings irrespective of race, caste, creed, religion or social status; education for all and specially for women, end of oppressive religious dogmas, end to untouchability all formed part of his reformist agenda. He quoted Christ in support his advocacy for social agenda.<sup>(7)</sup> He lived by all the principles he preached. He donated liberally for education of the poor children and propagated the establishment of cottage industries for self reliance. To show his commitment against untouchability he shared meals in the house of a *Tamata* family in Almora and *Mehtar* family in Agra. He began editing two publications "*PREM*" and "*NIRBAL SEWAK*" to propagate his ideas and engaged the services of preachers who would go around different places with his message of social transformation, religious tolerance, social equality etc. Frustrated by the slow and relatively small impact of his campaigns at home, he was increasingly convinced that the roots of British imperial power in India could be destroyed only by the collective force of international action

from outside. In 1914 he decided to go abroad to forge an anti-imperialist international alliance for removing the British from India. Beginning of the First World War was an ideal time as the British Empire had entangled with some powerful enemies. During his world tour in 1907 he had already experienced widespread anti-British sentiments in various parts of the world that he thought of uniting as one combined international force to invade British India and uproot the Empire.

### **Anti-Imperialist Combat Zone: International Windstorm**

Impatient to drive the British out of India he was convinced that India's freedom struggle could well be fought from outside. In the outbreak of the First World War Mahendra Pratap saw a significant opportunity to forge an anti-British alliance to launch attack on British possessions in India. He bade goodbye to his wife weeping and leaving the two children sleeping to reach Bombay on his way to Geneva. On her international tour in 1907 itself Rani had realised that her husband was made up of a magnificent stuff. She looked after the children and waited for his return that was not to be as she passed way in 1925 when Mahendra Pratap was transiting from Tibet to Japan.

Raja Mahendra Pratap moved like a petrel around the world and earned the sobriquet of 'Indian Napoleon'. He travelled widely and made important strides in the mobilisation of efforts outside India to carry out his mission to oust British empire. In this article we have tried to map out his period of exile when he remained active in international networks of anti-colonial protest but unfortunately not adequately represented in the historical writings on the global dimensions of Indian nationalist and anti-colonial activism. He was truly an internationalist whose struggle was embedded in the international community of radical politics<sup>(8)</sup>. On his first stop Mahendra Pratap reached Geneva where he met the famous Shyamji Krishnavarma<sup>(9)</sup>. It was a meeting of great visionaries who shared a common faith and admiration for Arya Samajist social reformer and proponent of cultural nationalism Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Founder of the Ghadar Party Lala Har Dayal and a Berlin Committee member Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.<sup>(10)</sup> were also there. He received a letter from one Umrao Singh Majithia, a nationalist

émigré native of Punjab inviting him to visit Germany. <sup>(11)</sup> He was acting at the behest of German Government. <sup>(12)</sup> It is here that Pratap discovered the convergence of his own goal with that of Germany. Har Dayal informed about the activities of his party members in Germany and introduced Pratap to the German Consul General. Sympathetic and supportive Consular promised to help him reach Germany. Har Dayal left for Berlin and Pratap traveled along with Biren Chattopadhyaya to reach Berlin on 10th February 1915. Biren was familiar with situation in Germany and assured Pratap that the Kaiser will certainly meet him.

In Berlin, Mahendra Pratap was accorded the royal welcome with receptions and banquets and with German officers in attendance. There he met Mr. Arthur Zimmermann, German Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs who himself was an enthusiastic supporter of Indian revolutionaries to undermine the British Empire. Zimmermann accompanied Pratap to the Imperial Palace in *Tier Garten* for a meeting with Kaiser Wilhelm II.



Berlin-Tiergarten, das Schloss Bellevue

Source: <https://www.tip-berlin.de/berlin-besucher/sehenswuerdigkeiten/schloss-belleue-geschichte-wissenswertes-und-besucherinfos/>

Well informed about the strategic location of *Phulkian* States Kaiser extended a warm welcome to Pratap. Kaiser listened to Pratap's ideas of liberating India from the British rule that gladdened his heart<sup>(13)</sup> India had been a special target of Imperial Germany for its political and economic importance to British Imperialism. When war broke out in 1914, Germany considered the practical possibilities of using the Indian nationalist revolutionaries.<sup>(14)</sup> Kaiser then discussed his own plans for nearly an hour how he planned the invasion of British India through Afghanistan with the help of his ally the Ottoman Empire of Turkey and the Muslim solidarity. Shortly before the start of the First World War the Kaiser had expressed that even "*if we are to be bled to death, at least England shall lose India.*"<sup>(15)</sup> In Kaiser's plans Pratap saw the opportunity for the success of his own project. He persuaded the Kaiser to write letters to 27 princely states in India to support German plans for invasion of British India. The Kaiser decorated him with the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle Second Class.

Before Raja left Germany he made a dashing visit to the battle front on the Polish border where he also received some instructions in the art of warfare that stood in good stead for him to organize his army in Kabul and later in Japan.

Kaiser entrusted Pratap with a letter to be presented to the Amir of Afghanistan. Buoyed by German plans with the support of the Ottoman Empire<sup>(16)</sup> Raja's task was to get the Amir of Afghanistan to facilitate the invasion through North-western part of India. Accompanied by an entourage along with Maulana Barkatullah, few Afghan Afridi soldiers and members of Berlin Committee, Raja left Germany on his mission to Kabul. Kaiser deputed a diplomat of the rank of the Secretary of Legation Dr. Werner Otto von Hentig to ensure safe journey throughout.

After a long and arduous journey of over six months crossing a continental landmass including parts of the "Fertile Crescent" of mountains, desert, rivers and oceans the mission arrived in Kabul on 2 October 1915, a trip that Mahendra Pratap enjoyed thoroughly. Mission's primary objective was to have a meeting with the Amir of Afghanistan; Mahendra Pratap looked for every opportunity to forge as broad an alliance as possible. At Vienna,

though it was only a chance meeting with Khedive of Egypt but Raja had a series of meetings with him in an attempt to enlist the support of the power of Pan-Islamic unity to his cause. Constantinople the Capital of the Ottoman Empire was his next major stop where Mahendra Pratap was received with warmth and honour as he was accorded in Germany. Meeting with Sultan was cordial but non-committal. His brother-in-law and the War Minister Enver Pasha was extremely courteous and forthcoming in meeting every demand including a letter to the Amir of Afghanistan from the Sultan and instructions to the Turkish military officers to provide safe passage to the mission up to Persia. <sup>(17)</sup> Now the Indo- German-Turkish expedition set out across Persia to Afghanistan led by General Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer and the diplomat Werner Otto von Hentig. <sup>(18)</sup>



Indo- German-Turkish Mission in Kabul

Mahendra Pratap, centre, with (left to right) Maulavi Barkatullah, Werner Otto von Hentig, Kazim Bey, and Walter Röhr. Kabul, 1916

Source: The Afghan Newspaper Siraj al-Akhbar. Bulletin. 1916. Ref: The German Mission to Afghanistan, 1915-1916. Thomas L. Hughes. German Studies Review, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Oct., 2002), pp. 447-476, PD-US, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14243649>

Afghans are an integral part of a cultural sphere nurtured by the values of Brahmanical Buddha where the guest is accorded the status of a divine messenger. Indo-German-Turkish mission of Raja Mahendra Pratap was accorded a royal welcome and housed in a palatial accommodation at Bagh-

e-Babur. However, the mission had to wait for over three weeks before getting an audience with Amir Habibullah Khan. Three weeks of interlude offered Pratap valuable opportunity to interact and make friends with members of the Royal family, government officials and Governors of the Empire who were all excited about his plans for India. With such prodigious presentiments the mission entered into negotiation with the Amir and presented to him the letters from the Sultan and the Kaiser. But the Amir remained non-committal. He demanded much but refused to commit himself. Little did the mission know that Amir was lured by the British with lavish offerings and concessions to keep him on their side that Germany could not. The mission at least pleaded for the release of Indian internees, one of whom was Obeidullah Sindhi, from Afghan prison and as mark of goodwill that was granted immediately.

In order to demonstrate his conviction and determination he established the 'Provisional Government of India' (*Hakumat-e-Mokhtari-i-Hind*) in *Bagh-e-Babur* in Kabul on December 1, 1915 that happens to be the date of his birth. Pratap became the President for Life or until the Government was handed over to Congress; Maulana Barkatullah Khan as the Prime Minister and Obeidullah Sindhi as the Home Minister, Champak Raman Pillai as the Foreign Minister and Maulana Bashir as the War Minister.



The provisional government in Kabul  
[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

This coincided with a period of revolutionary ferment throughout the colonial world and planned Ghadar Party rebellion in India at Lahore. With the help of Afghan Afridis Raja raised an army of 12000 soldiers in Kabul and requested Germany to provide another unit of 20,000 men. On receiving the news about the creation of a Provisional Government in Kabul and its planned military operation the British government in India was petrified at the prospects of Turkish-German attack from Afghanistan as the police and soldiers based in north-western region of India were practically armless<sup>(19)</sup>. This bold move, however, electrified the spirit of international revolutionaries including the Ghadar Party, Berlin Committee, Khilafat Movement in India. The Provisional government also received tacit support of the Indian National Congress. The British colonial administration in India acted swiftly and declared Raja as a fugitive revolutionary.



Bagh-e-Babur Palace in Kabul

<https://m.facebook.com/664712063568340/photos/a.664781796894700/664786340227579/?type=3>

The Provisional Government soon received recognition by Afghanistan, Germany, Russia, Turkey and many other smaller states under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim Solidarity under Ghalib Pasha added their voice to that of the Ottoman Sultan by declaring a jihad against the British

Empire of India. He began writing letters under his seal as the President of the new Government and concluded an agreement with the Amir of Afghanistan to set up the Headquarters of his Government in *Bagh-e-Babur* and establish diplomatic relations with other powers. <sup>(20)</sup> The Provisional Government promptly issued a manifesto announcing its objectives and a Proclamation calling for unity of all religions in India and urged the princely states to rise against the British Empire <sup>(21)</sup> which was intercepted and seized by the British.

Leaving Afghanistan aside, Pratap pinned his hopes on Russia. He quietly suggested to the Amir of seeking alliance with Russia to which the Amir agreed and deputed his Prime Minister to draw plans with him. Pratap immediately sent a letter to the Czar on a platter of solid gold urging Russia to extend its sphere permanently towards Asia.<sup>(22)</sup> Preoccupied with worsening situation at home Czar was not much impressed by the idea. Moreover, imperial Russia was an ally of colonial Britain. Not a man to give up Raja Mahendra Pratap continued his efforts with greater optimism after the change in regime. He finally made it to the Soviet Union to meet Trotsky who himself was a supporter of India's independence struggle. Mahendra Pratap spent a month in Petrograd trying to understand the emerging Soviet system. He was much impressed by various decrees and proclamations of the new regime focusing on peace, freedom and equality of all citizens. He saw in the young Soviet state a potential ally in his anti-imperialist struggle.

Meanwhile the news arrived of the assassination of King Habibullah in Afghanistan and his successor Amir Amanullah Khan who declared war against the British. The young Soviet State recognised the independence of Afghanistan. Encouraged by such developments Mahendra Pratap returned to Afghanistan to find the political climate more conducive. Mahendra Pratap acquired Afghan citizenship that protected him from possible British arrest. The new political dispensation in Kabul conferred upon him the diplomatic status of economic emissary and charged to deliver King's letters to the rulers of China, Nepal, Tibet, Japan, Siam and Turkey. Throughout 1920s he presented his diplomatic credentials in different capitals that enabled him to expand his network for "collective action". His idea of collective action prompted him to propose the creation of an International Socialist Army

comprising Russia, Afghanistan, Germany-Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey but the idea did not find favours with any nation. Shuttling between various capitals of the world the traveling revolutionary often stopped at Tashkent which was an important centre of revolutionary gatherings and the seat of the *University of Toilers of the East* where he made friends with people like Deng Hsiao Ping, Ho Chi-minh, Tan Malaka etc who became powerful leaders in Asia.<sup>(23)</sup> His lectures at the University mainly focused on highlighting the plight of Indian people under the oppressive British imperialism, idea of Asian Unity and the World Governance. Mahendra Pratap became the key interpreter of British colonialism in India and campaign to overthrow imperialism.

In March 1919 Maulana Barkatullah the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of India found himself in Moscow as the Ambassador Plenipotentiary of the Government of Afghanistan. His intellectual inquisitiveness led him to study the Soviet system that he found very impressive and wrote several articles and pamphlets “*Bolshevik Ideas and Islamic Thought*” “*Appeal to all Muslims of Asia*” “*Oriental Policy*” and finally ‘*Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations*’ urging the Muslim states of Central Asia to embrace Soviet system.<sup>(24)</sup> That endeared him to the Soviet regime and facilitated access to Lenin himself. Through one of his liaising parleys with Lenin he arranged Pratap’s meeting with Lenin on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1919 with a delegation comprising himself, Abdur Rab, M.P.T. Acharya, Dilip Singh Gill and Ibrahim. Lenin practically rolled out a red carpet and accorded a warm welcome <sup>(25)</sup>

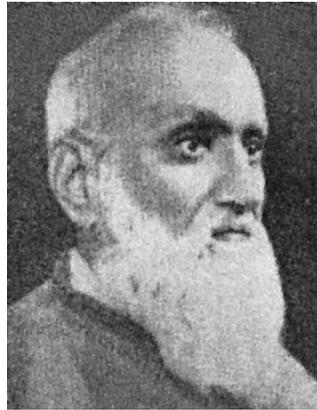
Mahendra Pratap presented his book *Religion of Love* to which Lenin declared as Tolstoyism. Pratap had two main objectives; viz to seek Soviet support to raise a liberation army to invade British India through Afghanistan as the latter was now an independent state; and to seek recognition of his own Provisional Government. Soviet government expressed inability to accede to any of these demands. On the contrary Lenin advised him to go back to India to wage ‘class struggle’ and establish the ‘dictatorship of proletariat’. Mahendra Pratap was attracted to Soviet ideals of anti-colonial, anti-imperialism and its concern for the welfare of the common man. But he was not quite impressed

by the theory of class struggle and the idea of dictatorship of proletariat. Socialist ideals attracted him for their egalitarian and enlightened approach to human life but he saw greater value for India in the democratic form of governance. A later day historian commented that “*Lenin and Mahendra Pratap lived in two different worlds.*” Mahendra Pratap did not accept Lenin’s concept of ‘dictatorship of proletariat’ because he believed in the supremacy of a benevolent ‘intelligent upper class’ for the benefit of the country and the proletariat. <sup>(26)</sup>

Maulana Barkatullah stayed on in Moscow, and was soon joined by Obeidullah Sindhi where the two continued to work for Soviet State propagating among the Muslims of Central Asia the idea that the basic tenets of Communism and Islam are not contradictory. In the thought of Mohammed Barkatullah (1859–1927), Pan-Asianism, Pan-Islamism, and Asian communism were intimately connected.<sup>(27)</sup>



Maulan Barkatullah Bhopali  
www.TwoCircles.net



Maulana Obeidullah Sindhi  
WIKIPEDIA.ORG

World War I ended in Allied victory and Anglo-Afghan war ended with a peace treaty (Treaty of Rawalpindi) that recognized Afghan independence, settled Afghanistan and British Indian boundary at Durand Line and Afghanistan gained control of its foreign policy. This altered political climate left little scope for Mahendra Pratap’s activities. Under such conditions not many countries were willing to support the Provisional Government of

Independent India that it practically became defunct by 1922.

Period after the end of World War I (1919-1925) was a period of intense revolutionary ferment in Europe a glimpse of which Pratap personally witnessed at one night in Hungary. Still hopeful of a joint Afghan-Soviet cooperation in support of his anti-imperialist struggle Pratap left Moscow to reach Berlin in January 1922 via Tashkent where he met some of his old friends and the legendary M N Roy to discuss their plans for the liberation of India. Declared as a fugitive rebel by the British government with a prize on his head,<sup>(28)</sup> returning to India was not on his agenda. British government also confiscated his assets in India by enacting the Mahendra Pratap Estate Act in 1924,

When he needed a secure and stable place to work, he established his office at Leipzig in 1922 from where he started publishing revolutionary literature to be distributed far and wide. In the rising tide of revolutionary fervour in Europe he saw an opportunity to garner wider support for the independence of India. Many of his articles were published in different papers and magazines in India as Raja received couple of letters including few from Jawaharlal Nehru whom he later met in Switzerland. <sup>(29)</sup> With the hostile authorities close on heels Pratap drew plans to undertake extensive travels. After wandering in Europe Zurich, Berlin, Paris etc for few years he went to Mexico and then to the US.

On First January 1925 Raja Mahendra Pratap was in New York. Since he was still holding Afghan diplomatic passport he was acting as its unofficial economic emissary to raise American capital investments in Afghanistan. Along with this he also raised funds for his own cause through coordination with the Hindustan Ghadar Party. The outcome of this campaign surprised Pratap as he was able to collect a whopping sum of \$ 12500 with the support of the members of Ghadar Party as well as Indian residents in New York. Pratap closely engaged with the Ghadar Party in drawing plans for a rebellion against the British Empire from various locations in the world. In this connection he was assigned to go to Tibet to arouse rebellion and then to move on to Nepal to conduct revolution in India.

With sufficient funds in hand and seven volunteers Mahendra Pratap left San Francisco on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1925 to reach Japanese port on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1925. Although received very warmly by the Japanese press he quickly moved to Peking on his way to Tibet, his ultimate destination. Peking was abuzz with revolutionary activities where he shared a platform with Madame Sun Yat-sen and met Panchen Lama. He reached as far as Chamdo in Tibet from where he wrote a letter to H H Dalai Lama who responded to his letter very warmly but stopped his further advance towards Lhasa. Stuck in mountains with his money depleting fast he returned to Peking. A letter was also sent to the King of Nepal who did not respond. Meanwhile Raja received an invitation to attend the Pan-Asiatic conference at Nagasaki and decided to reach Japan. But this time his entry into Japan was delayed as he reached there without passport which was stolen on the way. Not able to attend the Nagasaki conference he planned one at Shanghai in 1927. A letter arrived from Maulana Barkatullah suggesting him to come to Berlin. Not able to stay for long in Japan he decided to proceed to Kabul via Moscow and then on to Berlin. In 1927 Berlin had little to offer; so on the suggestion of Maulana Barkatullah the two proceeded to the U S A to meet the Ghadar Party leaders who had sponsored Pratap's trip to Tibet. Soon it was time for Pan Asiatic Conference at Shanghai that he attended along with several other Japanese Pan-Asianist leaders. Raja played a significant role in the Shanghai Pan-Asian conference. Shuttling between Tokyo and Peking for over a year he again proceeded to Moscow where he was informed of a rising political trouble in Afghanistan that finally overthrew Amir Amanullah. Therefore he chose to go to Iran via Tashkent, one of his favourite stops.

He felt at home in Iran. Though a short stay at Tehran, he found time to reflect on his favourite project of World Federation.<sup>(30)</sup> After a few months of wandering in Russia, Tajikistan, he attended Second Anti Imperialist Conference in Frankfurt where he met some of the British Labour leaders. Still in good books of Afghan government he accepted to lead the economic mission on behalf of Afghanistan and moved to America. Along with seeking American capital investments in Afghanistan he went for a lecture tour around the United States until the October 1929. This was also the time when Raja began to rethink his strategy and saw the Far East as more congenial centre

to pursue his activities.

On 30<sup>th</sup> October 1929 Raja was onboard N Y K Taiyo Maru sailing to Japan where he landed on 16 November 1929 at Yokohama and went straight to the residence of Rash Behari Bose. This short sojourn in Japan was spent in P R work of reviving old contacts, delivering lectures on Indian struggle for independence and to garner support for his dream project of World Federation. He soon moved on to Peking to explore the possibility of his institutions the *World Federation* and the *Religion of Love* and engaged in the work of Pan-Asianist movement. In 1930 he established his office of World Federation in Tientung Khu near the Imperial Palace in Peking. There he established a free school, delivered lectures in various institutions, clubs and societies. The meetings of the World Federation and Sunday prayers of the Religion of Love attracted good number of participants. He discussed his ideas with many Chinese leaders of the time Gen Shih Ching Yang, Lord Mayor of Nanking Shih Ying, and Wang Ching Wei. The idea of raising an Army against British rule in India was still alive in his mind for which he toured around China, Japan and Mongolia recruiting volunteers but he soon gave up the plan and began to focus on “peace and reconciliation” leaning towards Gandhian mode of thinking. He dreamt of a Golden district of Far East comprising China, Japan, Manchuria, Korea, Mongolia and Tibet. <sup>(31)</sup>

After the declaration of Purna Swaraj at the Lahore Session of Congress in 1929 and the promulgation of Government of India Act 1935 that confirmed Provincial Autonomy, the nationalist leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, became quite optimistic of early end to the British colonial rule. Congress leadership began to plan for a final push and felt the need to consolidate all forces of revolutionary activities within and outside the country. There began a systematic attempt to get back all the revolutionaries from all over the world. <sup>(32)</sup> Special efforts were made to get Raja Mahendra Pratap back in India but due to British suspicion of his activities these efforts could not materialise.

## Raja Mahendra Pratap in Japan – Pan-Asianism

Executive Board of India, World Federation, Asiatic Army and Religion of Love Raja visited Japan as many times as the opportunities arose. Japan was on his itinerary during his first world tour in 1907 that made a lasting impression on his mind. “*It was like a fairy land*” he noted. Through a prism of civilisational transcendence he perceived a connect between Japan’s Sun origins with India’s Sun Dynasty and Jinmu Tenno conceptualisation with Jambhu Dweep (Island nation of Jambhu ie Indian sub-continent). He preferred to refer to Japan by its classical cultural identity *Nippon* <sup>(33)</sup>

## Raja Mahendra Paratap and Pan Asianism

The emergence of the Pan-Asianist ideology is generally considered to have been a reaction to Western imperial expansion in East Asia during the second half of the 19th century. Few organisations such as the Shin’asha (Society to Promote the Advancement of Asia, 1879) and the Kōa-kai (Society to Raise Asia, 1880) appeared to carry forward the movement. By the time Raja Mahendra Pratap began frequenting Japan, the Pan-Asianism had assumed centre stage in the mainstream ideological discourses in Japan and became an appealing idea for Asian solidarity among the leaders of the nationalist movements in Asian countries. Many advocates of Pan-Asianism were motivated by sincere feelings of solidarity and the Japanese promise to modernize Asian countries leading them to freedom from western imperialism. Mainstream discourse on Pan-Asianism was strengthened by the entry of Prince Konoe Atsumaro (1863-1904) an influential leader from Japan’s aristocratic family who established the East Asian Common Culture Association (EACCA) that became very active in China. More Japanese writers began to take Pan-Asianism seriously as an option for the country’s future course creating a wave of Pan-Asian writings in Japan and other Asian countries. The most influential work of this trend was a 1200 page magnum opus “Greater Asianism” (*Dai Ajiashugi*) published in 1916 by Kodera Kenkichi (1877–1949), a member of the House of Representatives. The book unleashed a wave of publications on Pan-Asianism during the World War I and later. Cultural unity emerged as the major theme of Asian

solidarity. One of the most famous advocates of Pan-Asianism based on the concept of cultural unity of Asia was Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzo) (1862-1913), an art historian, who had coined the slogan “Asia is One” in 1901.<sup>(34)</sup> He cultivated friendship with many Indian scholars including Rabindranath Tagore(1861-1941) and influenced many Pan-Asian writers in Japan most famous of whom was Okawa Shumei (1886–1957). Okawa was immersed in Indian Vedic philosophical ideology that influenced his perspectives on Pan-Asianism.

Against the background of such developments Mahendra Pratap pursued his activism of building coalition for Indian national struggle in Japan. Pan-Asianism was still largely a non-governmental enterprise his associates in Japan Rash Behari Bose and Okawa Shumei in association with Imazato Juntaro organised the First Pan-Asian Conference in Nagasaki in 1926. Mahendra Pratap was invited but could not attend due to denial of entry by the Japanese port police. In spite of various government restrictions the conference was attended by representatives from every corner of Asia; East Asia to West Asia. Even if the delegates held divergent perspectives, wider participation was an evidence of an overwhelming desire among participants for collective action to improve the lot of Asian people. Rash Behari Bose spoke eloquently and invoked a civilisational perspective of universalism;

*“We must not only unite to give birth to a new Asian civilisation but also to give birth to a new civilisation. Ultimately, this is not only for the good of the Asian people but to save the unfortunate human race globally.”<sup>(35)</sup>*

By espousing such universalistic ideology Bose clearly rejected the prevailing East-West binarism; instead advocated for a harmonious resolution of the Asian conundrum. However, invocation of such benevolent thoughts could not assuage divergent perspectives of various participants that reflected a lack of consensus on the principal objectives of such a unity. Raja learnt the details of this conference and vowed to attend the next one at Shanghai in 1927. Bose, Okawa, Imazato and Mahendra Pratap shared a common perspective of Pan Asianism bereft of any Anti-Westernism or racialism.

Although Shanghai conference was much smaller in size but the continuity signifies the importance the participants placed on the idea. Raja Mahendra Pratap participated as the representative of Afghanistan and the Islamic solidarity. Even before the start of the conference Sino-Japanese contest for hegemony was abundantly clear and remained a dominant factor throughout. The rivalry reflected more seriously on the drafting of the resolution at the conference. Only at the mediation of Raja Mahendra Pratap both China and Japan agreed to modify their respective proposals. For Raja Mahendra Pratap unity among Asian peoples was crucial for the success of his own concept of the Province of Buddha that constituted part of World Federation. Until the Shanghai conference there existed a clear gap between the Government and non-governmental perspectives. Soon after this conference, an interview given by Raja Mahendra Pratap in Japan's premiere newspaper *The Japan Advertiser* garnered huge support for him throughout East Asia. *The Japan Advertiser* published a long interview with him on 21 October 1927, and the *Osaka Mainichi* in Japan and the *China Press* in China followed his movements with interest. The publicity surrounding Pratap almost exceeded that of the conference itself,

Biggest challenge before Pan Asianist movement was to reconcile divergent perspectives among Asian people linguistic, cultural, religious and even racial. Such divergence became a significant factor behind the emergence of multiple forms of Pan Asianist movement. Nagatomi (Kajima) Morinosuke (1896-1975), who is described as "unique Asianist"<sup>(36)</sup> advocated 'Far Eastern Republic' a '*supra national regional bloc*'.<sup>(37)</sup> Nagatomi's Asianism, however, was subsequently subsumed in the powerful force of militarist ideological framework of Pan-Asianism. Raja Mahendra Pratap also saw a natural solution to such differences through a supra-national structure. However, the key difference between Nagatomi and Pratap's supra-national propositions was its ideological content. While Nagatomi's supra-nationalism was anchored on politico-economic unity but Pratap's proposition was based on civilisational perspective of universal values. Raja had the intellectual support of Bose, Imazato, Okawa who shared common civilisational vision. Many others developed visions of an Asian future with explicit overtones of anti-imperialist (Pan) Asianism rather than with communism.<sup>(38)</sup> Such visions

found expression in the Pan-Asianist imaginings of Mahendra Pratap and in Asianist reformulations of the Khilafat issue and Pan-Islamism. <sup>(39)</sup>

## Reactions from Asia

Among the non-Japanese Asians, Pan-Asianism may have been an ambiguous issue at the beginning but many Chinese and Koreans joined the Kōa-kai; the Ottomans, Arabs, and Indians sympathized with the idea of pan-Asian unity against the Western imperialism. After the Russo-Japanese War Japan's foreign policy formulations began to indicate Japan's imperial ambitions but Japan's role as an imperial power remained ambiguous. Nevertheless, many individual Japanese remained supportive of like-minded Asians and most Asians continued to look at Japan for cooperation, support, guidance, and leadership. Indian exiles in Tokyo and Kobe, for example, lobbied for Japanese support for the Indian independence movement. Rash Behari Bose (1841–1910), a naturalized Japanese citizen edited a journal titled *Asiatic Asia* whose contributions heavily criticized Western imperialist policies and expressed hope in a pan-Asian crusade led by Japan, against Western colonialism. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), **the leader of the Chinese revolution, gave speeches until shortly before his death in which he promoted** Asianism but also cautioned Japan to steer clear of imperialist ambitions. <sup>(40)</sup>

Like other Indian revolutionaries in Tokyo Raja Mahendra Pratap also believed in Japan's mission to liberate Asia from the yoke western colonialism and often traveled to China to deliver lectures convincing Chinese audience of the Japanese goals. His trips were often paid by the Japanese for which Chinese branded him as the Japanese propagandist <sup>(41)</sup>. However, Raja was disillusioned when Japan launched its imperial advance into the Asian continent and controlled Manchukuo as its territory rather than an independent country as promised.

## Raja Mahendra Pratap and Okawa Shumei

Raja Mahendra Pratap was introduced to Okawa Shumei by Rash

Behari Bose along with many others involved in Pan-Asiatic movement. Okawa Shumei was one of the most influential theoreticians of Pan-Asianist ideology in Japan and the two developed a subtle spiritual ideological bond for lifelong friendship. Okawa Shumei along with Toyama Mitsuru became principal points of contact for Raja Mahendra Pratap. Okawa was a man of versatile genius, a polymath and a polyglot, satiated with the profundity of Vedic thought that he imbibed through his philosophical and religious studies at the Tokyo Imperial University. “Unity of all mankind and happiness for all” is an ideal of a world view deeply embedded in Vedic philosophical doctrines. An important Indian thinker to have influenced Okawa’s philosophical and ideological orientation was Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) who argued for spiritual foundations of nationalism.

Braj, the place of Mahendra Pratap’s birth and the area of his estate that the Raja was so fond of is the spiritual land of Lord Krishna where every atom of soil and every whiff of the wind is soaked in lyrical melodies cherishing classical Indian mythical and philosophical tenets in rich infusion of folk traditions. The essence of philosophical tenets from classical texts derived in native dialect are so intricately and subtly embedded in folk traditions that touch the hearts of every child born in that area and unconsciously become the part of daily life and the basis of a world view. Pratap’s refined world view and internationalism were founded on these indigenous traditions and further embellished by his studies of Arya Samajist literature of Swami Dayanand Saraswati who believed in universal brotherhood, equality and harmony.

### **Pan-Asianism and The World Federation** <sup>(42)</sup>

The World Federalist Movement originated during the interwar period. It gained strength particularly when the League of Nations became an object of controversy. In the aftermath of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, individuals, organizations and nations sought new solutions for a world of greater stability, equality, and interdependency. Their multiple ends and objectives were held together, even if temporarily, by a passionate hope for an integratedness of the world and the desire and optimism to remake it and shape the future of humanity. The exponents of the movement advocated for

stronger democratic world institutions subjected to the federalist principles of collectivism, solidarity and democracy. Famous advocates of world federalism included Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Peter Ustinov, Rosika Schwimmer, Albert Camus, Winston Churchill, Garry Davis, Emery Reves, Wendell Willkie, Jawaharlal Nehru, E. B. White, and Lola Maverick Lloyd.<sup>(43)</sup>

Federalist ideas were often joined to Pan-Asianist ones. Even if dubbed as utopian, the goals of a world federation emphasized cooperation rather than East-West confrontation therefore could make Pan-Asianist ideas more agreeable to Western audiences. An advocate of harmonious global relationships, Nehru, too, advocated a world federation in this manner.<sup>(44)</sup> For most protagonists, Pan-Asianism was “an ideology that promoted the political and economic unity and cooperation of Asian peoples”<sup>(45)</sup> but Pratap’s ideas were more oriented towards civilisational values and spiritualism. To begin with the Pan-Asianist debates originated within the framework of liberalism whose ideologues included Tokichi Tarui (1850–1922) and Kentaro Oi (1843–1922) who argued for cooperative defence against the European powers. Raja Mahendra Pratap identified with such liberal thinking to realize his conception of Asian unity and harmony in East-West relations.

Strong Japanese support for Pan-Asianist movement cemented Mahendra Pratap’s conception of ‘Province of Buddha’, a constituent of World Federation. Many influential Japanese opinion makers, politicians, intellectuals began to argue for Japan to take leadership role to unite Asia against Western imperialism. Japan appeared as an ideal site for locating his institution. By this time he had seen enough of wars, rebellions, violence that he began to eschew and reformulated his internationalist agenda for Indian independence working through *World Federation* based on love, liberty and unity of mankind. In a world tormented by war, revolution, colonial oppression, imperialism and exploitation he conceptualised World Federation as a new civilisational framework for world peace, brotherhood, equality without any discrimination based on any nationality, race, religion, colour, gender, caste or creed. The ideas embracing transcendental civilisational values had taken roots in Japanese Buddhism in the latter half of nineteenth century during its

persecution by Shinto nationalism during the Meiji era.

For an individual driven by Vedic tenet of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is a Family) global perspectives are imbibed as innate characteristics. His dream project of World Federation emerged out of two inevitable elements of inspiration -- spiritualism and the internationalism. In his Autobiography *My Life Story...* he writes, “*This body (World Federation) was born in Braj.*” Braj was his birth place immersed in the holy spirit of Krishna consciousness. He further states, “*conceived the idea of World Federation at Tehran, Iran. The plan was thought out and written down at Moscow in Soviet Russia. ... World Federation was born in September 1929 at Berlin, Germany.*”<sup>(46)</sup> His travels around the world honed his ideas on internationalism.

Throughout his political life that continued much after the independence of India in 1947, he believed that India could be a leader in establishing such a body. In that context, while participating in the discussion on motion of thanks on President’s Address at the Lok Sabha on May 14, 1957, he said that “coexistence of all religions and harmony among them would be critical for the establishment of the world federation”. In the very first issue of World Federation he had advocated that the “Congress should kindly adopt the principles of World Federation as its creed and agree to support the movement of Pan-Asia as a part of World Federation.”

Much scholarly attention has been drawn to the question why Raja felt it important to start the movement in Asia. Stolte suggests, ‘one (reason) was his conviction that all world religions had been born on that continent, that they were all inherently peaceful, and contained elements of Buddhism in some form or other.’<sup>(47)</sup> The message of the Buddha was invoked as a tactical tool considered as “a potential unifier for all of Asia”. Versatile phrases such as ‘renunciation and service’ were deployed as watchwords with the hope to include Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists as well as socialists.”<sup>(48)</sup>

Universal harmony was an important element in his scheme of World Federation therefore “he consciously pitted his inclusive definition of Asia against anti-Westernism, which he considered too negative. In the November 1930 issue of World Federation he reiterated his commitment to East-West

harmony ‘*The conception of a vague Asian unity has been brought about more by non-Asiatic endeavour than by the Asiatics themselves. ... Many people having Asiatic consciousness well-nigh hate Europe and Europeans. We endeavour, however, to correct the attitude of Asiatics and Europeans to one another.*” He further invokes Rash Behari Bose’s ethical conception of Asian civilization who, in turn, used the Asiatic consciousness of Brahma Samajist Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884). “*We explain that all the peoples of Europe are the children of the early Asiatic colonisers who colonised the north-west peninsula of the old world.*” Once again, Asia was being projected as the moral upholder of civilisational values.

Such thoughts were symptomatic of a change occurring in his plans to form a ‘province of Pan-Asia’ (which he alternatively called the ‘Province of Buddha’). *I just want to see our Aryan [that is, South and Southeast Asia] developed into a free, powerful State, as a part of an autonomous Asia, in our World Federation. My services will go ... to arouse the peoples of Aryan to carve out their destiny!*<sup>(49)</sup>

Already disillusioned by Japanese approach towards Manchukuo, Pratap found it difficult to reconcile his ideological conception of Pan-Asianism with that of currently championed by the Japanese military leadership. When General Hideki Tojo asked him to accompany the Japanese army for an invasion of India he expressed his concern about the Manchukuo and suggested that “*The Japanese army should not enter India*” instead “*I will liberate India with my army and the Japanese army could support this move.*” This infuriated Tojo and Raja was asked to sit quiet in his place.<sup>(50)</sup> This discordance between the Japanese and Pratap’s views was later corroborated by A N Sahay in an essay written in honour of Raja Mahendra Pratap.<sup>(51)</sup>

Pratap chose to devote himself to his sublime cause of World Federation. Still having faith in Japanese benevolence towards India and their professed objective to lead Asia to freedom from western imperialism he established the headquarters of his World Federation in Japan at Kokubunji near Tokyo. Elaborate plans were made for inauguration of the centre on 1 December 1937 with prayers according to all the religions. The idea generated considerable interest among the Japanese intellectuals, expats and the Indian community.

Centre became a hub of activity. He used every opportunity to establish such centres in different locations, China, Philippines, Korea., Siam (Thailand) including in Europe. However, once the Japanese official displeasure with Pratap became known all Japanese supporters abandoned the Federation's Centre. But Pratap continued his efforts with dedication to maintain the centre where he honed his ideas of the World Federation and propagated the Religion of Love. Raja spent his time in isolation and desolation and without any financial support. Such a situation is best captured by Edward Said who wrote, "Exile is ....terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home, its essential sadness can never be surmounted." <sup>(52)</sup>

## **Religion of Love**

Amidst such travails of exile Mahendra Pratap steadfastly continued to work on his project of World Federation and practice and propagation of the Religion of Love. While at Kabul itself, he had written the book 'Religion of Love.' Based on his childhood *samskars* of his family tradition and his own experiences of global travels he proposed a religion where love for fellow humans would be the central faith. In his view, all the religions taught us the lessons of love and compassion. He believed in a formless God, who wants us to live in a good society. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jews and every other people were to believe in the centrality of humanity which is the essence of all these faiths. Not only did he advocate this, he practiced his doctrine. He specifically told Ubaidullah that after conquering India with the help of Afghans, he would not seek any post for himself instead he would become a preacher of his religion of love.

## **Asian Army and The Executive Board of India**

Raja conceptualized two significant institutions to achieve independence for India and liberation of Asia namely; Asian Army and an Executive Board of India. There was no operational connection between the two but both these were aimed at achieving some space towards the Indian independence

within the context of liberation of Asia.

## **Asian Army**

Formation of Asian Army was one of the most controversial steps in Raja's scheme of things on various counts. Firstly, it was in contradiction to the espousal of Buddhism and adherence to Gandhian principles of non-violence. Since the idea originated in the Pan-Asian Conference at Dairen in March 1934 all non-Japanese participants were chary of the idea as they suspected it to be a Japanese brainchild. The suspicion got deepened as all the directors of the organizations were Japanese. The Chinese were more outspoken to denounce the plan as a Japanese ploy and branded Mahendra Pratap as the Japanese puppet.

After 1935, however, Pratap distanced himself from the idea of Asian Army. He later clarified that the term 'Army' was a wrong choice of the term that created much confusion. He further asserted that *"we work to harmonise all walks of life. We hope to create new sense for the old barbarous terms."*<sup>(53)</sup>

## **Executive Board of India**<sup>(54)</sup>

Raja had a single minded devotion to the independence of India; even after the end of World War I and establishment of League of Nations he strongly apprehended the possibility of another war. He held "the robber instinct, aggressive elements and imperialism" responsible for the collapse of the League of Nations and uncertainties for reappearance of dark clouds of war. His internationalism convinced him that the *"wars are inevitable unless a just world government is established on the earth,"*<sup>(55)</sup> He cautioned the Indian community in Yokohama to be prepared for the war again and take advantage of the situation to liberate India. He had a clear plan, *"I recommend cooperation with Iran, Afghanistan, and understanding with Japan, Italy and Germany in case of war,"*<sup>(56)</sup> However, he reposed faith in Gandhian struggle for independence and promised that "from outside we will do what we can to bring complete independence to India."<sup>(57)</sup>

## Nomination for Nobel Prize for Peace <sup>(58)</sup>

Although Pratap's ideas were not universally lauded, they drew the attention of political leaders and thinkers worldwide and earned him a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1932 by a Swedish Doctor N A Nilsson who was a member of the *Commission of the Permanent International Peace Bureau*. The Bureau itself was a recipient of Nobel Peace Prize for the year 1910. The citation for the Nobel Peace Prize nomination stated.”

*“Pratap gave up his property for educational purposes, and he established a technical college at Brindaban. In 1913 he took part in Gandhi's campaign in South Africa. He traveled around the world to create awareness about the situation in Afghanistan and India. In 1925 he went on a mission to Tibet and met the Dalai Lama. He was primarily on an unofficial economic mission on behalf of Afghanistan, but he also wanted to expose the British brutalities in India. He called himself the servant of the powerless and weak.”* <sup>(59)</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi himself wrote in his *Young India*, July 4, 1929 <sup>(60)</sup> that *“Raja Mahendra Pratap is a great patriot. For the sake of the country this nobleman has chosen exile as his lot. He has given up his splendid property...for educational purposes. Prem Mahavidyalaya...is his creation.”*

After the Japanese defeat in 1945 and the Allied Occupation Mahendra Pratap was arrested and kept in Sugamo prison. After about six months with the help of Indian leaders and his American friends he was released. Finally, in 1946 Mahendra Pratap was allowed to return to India and he immediately rushed Wardha to meet Mahatma Gandhi. The following year, Great Britain granted India independence and Mahendra Pratap spent the rest of his life continuing to push his political agenda of working for the deprived sections of the society. He chose to work for strengthening the panchayati raj and advocated greater power for local assemblies. Despite his defeats in working with foreign powers in an attempt to overthrow British rule, there is no doubt that the India created after independence has more in common with his vision than that of the traditional India that existed before the colonization of the country. Whether it is better or not would depend on the view one has of Indian history and the heights achieved in those days the current republic

has separated itself from.

## Epilogue

Discovering and honouring the forgotten freedom fighters has been an important agenda of the government. Since 2014 thousands of such local heroes have been discovered and brought to limelight. Even at the possibility of platform becoming overcrowded the Chief of Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh Sri Mohan Bhagwatji has publicly announced that it will continue to press the government to systematically carry on this programme of honouring all such local heroes who were associated with the freedom struggle in any way. This may well be dubbed as a political maneuver to gain populist support at the grassroots but this effort has certainly gained support in the public.

Raja Mahendra Pratap was not like any other freedom fighter. He was a towering personality whose contributions are unmatched. Throughout his struggles abroad he made every attempt to coordinate his campaign with the national struggle in the country. He kept in touch with congress leadership including Mahatma Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malviya and many others etc and when he returned to India he went straight to meet Gandhiji at Wardha. His international struggle for independence was no less than any international revolutionary. In fact, in many ways his international activities such as the establishment of the 'Provisional Government of Independent India' at Kabul, organising international support for Indian independence were a precursor to Subhash Chandra Bose. Raja also played an important role in the organisation of Indian National Army that later became Azad Hind Fauz.

It is quite surprising how the post-independence national leadership did not accord adequate recognition to his contribution even if his ideas were more in tune with that of Congress. His nomination to the Nobel Peace Prize was the most significant recognition in the international arena. In the second general election he even defeated Atal Behari Vajpayee and met Indira Gandhi. It is to the credit of the B J P leadership that in spite of ideological dissonance the government at the centre and the state of UP has

taken upon itself to accord due recognition of his sacrifices. The leadership has demonstrated that irrespective of ideological orientation the government will continue to recognize all such revolutionaries.

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42. Sven Saaler & Christopher W. A. Szpilman *Raja Mahendra Pratap: Indian Independence, Asian Solidarity, World Federation, 1930*, in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History, 1920–Present*, Ed. Sven Saaler & Christopher W. A. Szpilman, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011)
43. Pan-Asianism, Wikipedia.
44. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: the Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day, 1941), 371–84.
45. Wikipedia.
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47. Stolte. No. 8. Invoking Buddhism was not something unusual at that time as many Asiatic minded people felt Buddhism as the convenient tool of Asian union.
48. Ibid.
49. Raja. No. 3 Pp. 143
50. Vir Singh, 'Raja Mahendra Pratap and the Executive board of India at Tokyo' in Vir Singh (Ed) *The Life and Times of Raja Mahendra Pratap*. Originals. 2005 Pp70-84. On hindsight it is plausible to surmise that if Tojo had considered Raja's advice more seriously and friendly then Japan could escape history's most humiliating defeat losing 1, 50,000 people in its battle of Kohima against British India. And if it could consider the idea of World Federation in place of its Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, Japan could win the support of entire Asian people without fighting a war and gain global leadership.
51. A N Sahay, 'Dwitiya Vishwa Yuddh aur Raja Saheb'. (Second World War and Raja Saheb) (in Hindi) in Vir Singh (Ed) *The Life and Times of*

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52. Edward Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press. 2002. Pp. 173. ISBN 9780674009974
53. Raja. No. 3. 243.
54. For more details and the constitution of the Executive Board of India see Vir Singh No. 50. Appendix 'A' Pp.85-86
55. Raja. No.3
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. The statutes of the Nobel Foundation restrict disclosure of information about the nominations, whether publicly or privately, for 50 years. The restriction concerns the nominees and nominators, as well as investigations and opinions related to the award of a prize. At: <https://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/peace/> While nominating for the Nobel Peace Prize, the nominator in a short biography gave Singh's status as follows: Singh "is the editor of the World Federation and an unofficial envoy of Afghanistan. The nominator wrote a short biography as well as international political activities. Particularly his role in the Indo-Turco-German mission was highlighted. For instance, Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany and Sultan Moheemod Rishad of Turkey gave him letters for the Afghan King. He arrived in Kabul on Oct. 2, 1915. On December 1, 1915, a Provisional Government for India was organised. Pratap was declared as its President. In 1917 he went to Russia and met Trotsky at Leningrad. From there he came back to meet Kaiser and Sultan, to give the message of the King of Afghanistan. He passed some time in Budapest and Switzerland. He was brought by German aeroplane to Russia, where he met Lenin. From there he went to Afghanistan. King Amanullah sent him on a mission to China, Tibet, Japan, Siam, Germany, Turkey and the U.S.A. After an agreement with the British, the King lost interest in Pratap. In the end, it is summarized: "He is primarily on an unofficial economic mission of Afghanistan. However, being born as an Indian he also wanted to expose the British brutalities in that land of the idealist Americans. At this juncture, when the great freedom movement of India is developing

with large momentum it is in the interest of the spiritually minded as well as business people to study carefully this new phenomenon of our social life. .... He hopes to achieve some practical results in this direction during his present sojourn in this country (U.S.A.). He is planning to establish an Afghanistan information bureau and an office of the World Federation at Washington, D.C. He just tries to do his duty according to his best understanding and leaves the working of fate to the Laws of Nature!".. "It will be of interest to know – Why a Swede nominated Singh? The answer is to be found in the documents, which were sent with the nomination letter. Namely, Singh supported the idea of “World Federation”, about which N.A. Nilsson, propagated in 1910, as is evident from: “Fédération Internationale – Discours Au – xviii Congrès Universel de la paix (International Federation – Speeches in – xviii Universal Congress of Peace).” Rajinder Singh (2016) *Inside Story of Nobel Peace Prize Award – Indian Contestants*. Shaker, Aachen. pp. 21–30. ISBN 978-3844043389 Cited in Wikipedia

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