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MODERN INDIA**  
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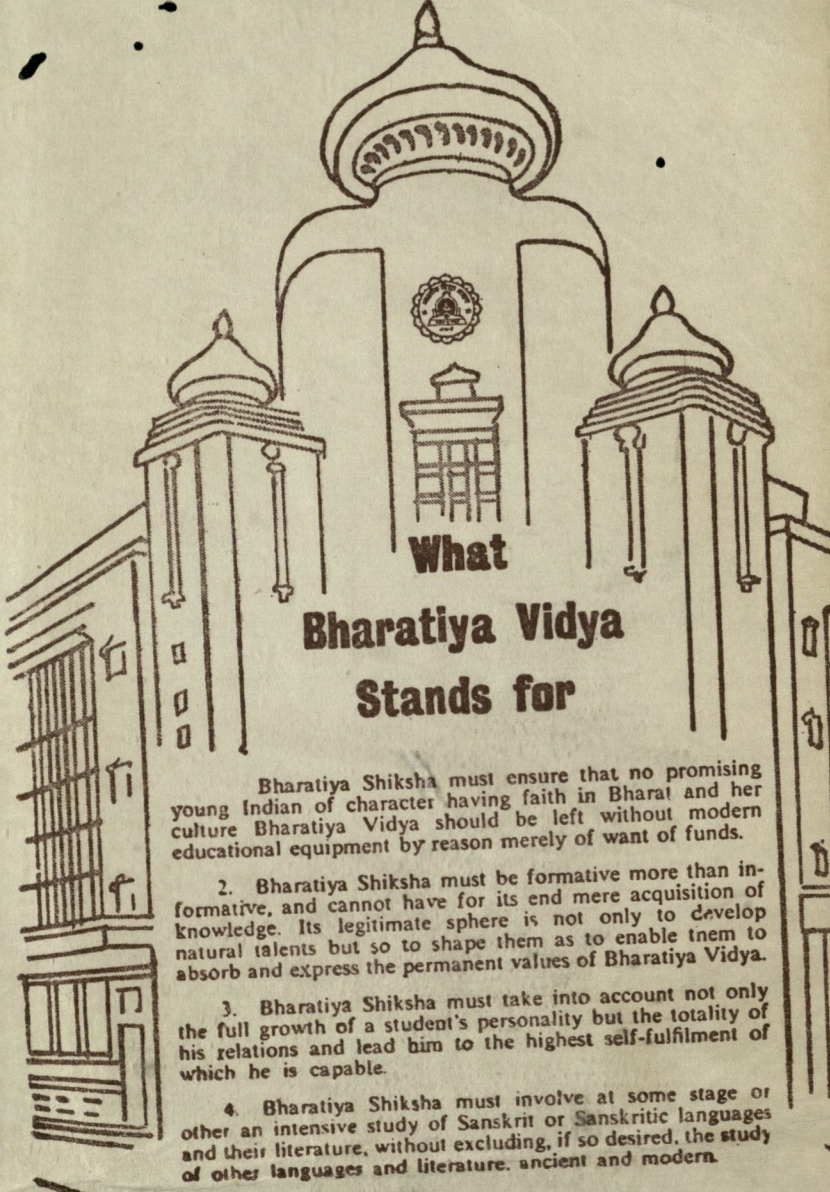
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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side*

—Rigveda, I. 89. i

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**BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY**

***RUPEE SERIES***

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*General Editors*

**K. M. MUNSHI**

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**FRANCE  
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MODERN INDIA**

By  
**B. BISSOONDOYAL**

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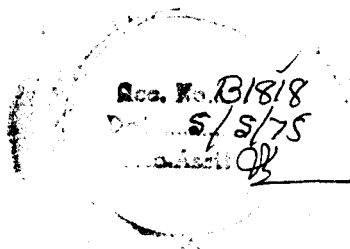
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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,  
Chowpatty Road, Bombay-7.  
*Vijaya Dashami*  
September 28, 1963

K. M. MUNSHI

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## INTRODUCTION

From among the great of this century we have chosen five great Indians about whom we have something to say. We are giving short chapters since we realize that in an age of hurry much time is not devoted to the reading of books.

Our work opens with an essay on Gurudev Tagore and Dr. Schweitzer, his critic. The Birth Centenary of the poet was being celebrated when we wrote an article that was accepted by an Indian periodical. That article is here elaborated.

But Tagore is not the only Indian known to the people of France. The others are Lala Lajpat Rai, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and the saint Vinoba Bhave.

The book deals with them all.

It is disappointing to find that F. Seymour Smith has not listed Gandhi's autobiography in *What Shall I Read Next?* although some books translated into English find mention in it. Smith surely is the only one to pretend that *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* is a work with no claims to immorality. The book is quite popular in France. The second edition of the French translation is in the press.

This regrettable omission will not prevent any one from reading books by and on Mahatmaji. There is a spate of such works. They have come in an unbroken stream. Nevertheless, we felt that there is a growing need of knowing him as a guest of Greater India. If his fruitful and long stay in South Africa is not unknown very few are those who have so much as heard it said that he had spent three busy weeks in Mauritius. It will be admitted that this little book meets a genuine need.

As the Birth Centenary of Lala Lajpat Rai, the Lion of the Punjab, like that of Mahatma Hansraj, was celebrated in early 1965 there was and is a desire to know him better. If our choice has fallen on him too it is because we have kept in mind the desire of countless Indians in and outside India.

When the Brahmo Samaj of Calcutta, the Veda Samaj of Madras and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay were in the heyday of youth there were at most only half a lakh of Indians settled outside India. They were left untouched by these religious movements. At the time the Arya Samaj appeared the number of Indians outside India had increased tenfold. The Arya Samaj brought them a new message. Hence it is that the names of Rai and Hansraj were known in Greater India. Lahore became the Banaras of Indians abroad.

### *Toynbee On Vinoba*

Acharya Vinoba is Mahatma Gandhi's disciple to whom the great historian Arnold Toynbee has paid a well-deserved tribute in these memorable words:

"Non-violent action is, I should say, a characteristic Indian accomplishment. Already, since its success in settling the political issue between India and Britain, it has found a new field of action in India's domestic life. I am referring, of course, to the Bhoodan movement. And then, if one looks back into the past, one finds Ashoka acting in the same spirit. One finds him substituting religious propaganda for military aggression as his instrument for unifying the World."<sup>1</sup>

Vinoba is to Gandhi what Ashoka was to the Buddha.

### *Vinoba and Aiyar*

In Free India such scholars are not wanting who have made it their duty to come into contact with foreign lands not necessarily by visiting them.

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<sup>1</sup> *One World and India.*

If Acharyaji is known to Toynbee he is 'equally' known to famous French authors. He is one who has earned undying fame.

Saint Vinoba is interested in France and French letters. Dr. Aiyar's love of French letters is matched by that of Saint Vinoba. This is how these great Indians are in communion with the French Spirit. Dr. C. P. Ramaswami's love of French literature finds mention in this entry:

"Born 12 Nov. 1879; Fellow of University, 1912, Member of the Indian National Congress and was its All-India Secretary, 1917-18; one of the Indian representatives at the Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva, 1926 and 1927; resigned membership of Madras Government, March 1928, and rejoined the Bar, April 1928; member of sub-committee to draft constitution for writing British India and the Indian States in a Federation, 1930; acting Law Member, Government of India, 1931; Tagore Law Lecturer, Calcutta University, 1932; Chairman of Committee appointed by Chamber of Princes to consider the White Paper, 1933; drafted a new constitution for Kashmir, 1934; Member of the Government of India Committee on Secretariat Procedure, 1935, etc. *Publications*: Contributions to various periodicals on political and literary topics; interested in French literature.—*Who's Who*"

It is interesting to note that neither Dr. Aiyar nor Acharyaji has lived in Pondicherry where French is spoken. Their interest is that of persons who wish to enrich their knowledge. They are genuine scholars.

The love of French by Indians of note has had far-reaching effects. French authors, in their turn, were fascinated by modern India. It is thanks to their numerous works on Gandhi, Tagore, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Lajpat Rai and Vinoba, amongst others, that Indians settled in French colonies have been brought near to India. Must not India that is now free, know this?

Had Romain Rolland lived long he would no doubt

'have come to admire the Acharya and requited the love that the Indian saint bears France.

Vinoba attracted the attention of the outside world only after Rolland and Gandhi had both gone to their rest. This is a fact that is known even to school boys. In a recent work meant primarily for them we read:

"Born in a Brahmana family from Kolaba district on September 11, 1895, the *acharya* interrupted a course of higher education to join the Mahatma in 1916, when he entered the Sabarmati Ashram. Five years later Gandhiji placed him in charge of a branch of the Ashram at Wardha. Vinoba also played his part in achieving the freedom of his countrymen, serving several sentences in jail mainly for his share in the movement to allow Harijans to enter Hindu temples. Since the Mahatma's death in 1948, Vinoba has travelled on foot all over the country in pursuit of his ideals of *Sarvodaya*. His *pad yatra* made a deep impression on the minds of the people.

In 1953 he started the Bhoodan Movement, which now forms so conspicuous a part of the *Sarvodaya* programme. According to the *acharya*, *Sarvodaya* aims at the happiness of all the people, as distinct from Western ideal of the greatest good of the greatest number."<sup>1</sup>

Vinoba's movement would no doubt have had the desired effect and Rolland would have written much on it. That friend of India was interested not only in Swami Vivekananda and the Mahatma but also in Rai. In his *Journal* he has dwelt at some length on other famous Indians.

All the five eminent Indians were interested in the people of France that love them. And of the five only one is in the land of the living. The love Vinoba has for France will not die.

When we first wrote about these great souls *Sarvodaya* and other Indian periodicals readily published our articles.

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<sup>1</sup> *India Through the Ages*, pp. 556-7.

The gesture of the editors was much appreciated not only by us but by all those who read the articles. It goes without saying then that it is a pleasant duty that we are performing when we are thanking them wholeheartedly.

PORT LOUIS,

B. BISSOONDOYAL

*Mauritius:*

January 15, 1966.

# 1

## RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND HIS CRITIC

The renewal of interest in Tagore and his works dates from 1961, the year when the birth centenary of the poet was celebrated with *éclat*.

In the course of half a century he attracted attention twice. It is noteworthy that on the eve of World War I when India was almost unknown, when she was misrepresented, Tagore appeared upon the scene.

That India should have had an illustrious son like him at that time is highly significant.

### *A Prominent Figure of the Renaissance*

He was one of the most prominent figures of the Indian Renaissance. In the age of the famous translators of Indian religious works like Max Muller, Wilson, Burnouf and other eminent Orientalists the outside world could have but a faint idea of the message India has to deliver.

Tagore came and that message became explicit.

He was in the long line of sages who have served their fellow-beings by reminding them that India has something important to say.

He travelled to Europe, Japan and America, met Einstein, Romain Rolland and others. But, strangely enough, this traveller who travelled widely did not for a moment keep India out of mind and write about the countries he had visited.

When he passed away, Sir Stafford Cripps addressed an audience and said, amongst other things, that after visiting China Tagore let some of his hearers know his impressions. His own words were:

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE VEDANTA

The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, was the rage in Calcutta when Narendranath Datta was born exactly a century ago.

### *The Youth*

As a youth he felt drawn towards that Samaj and even became its member.

His meeting with Ramakrishna Paramahansa brought about a radical change.

He donned the Sannyasin's ochre-coloured robe and went out to America where he made a name for himself at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893.

He visited Europe where he made the acquaintance of Max Muller who in *Auld Lang Syne, Second Series (My Indian friends)* and *Biographical Essays*, gave pen-pictures of some great Indians like Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati. To Paramahansa Ramakrishna he devoted a whole book.

Information is what he needed. Swami Vivekananda had sent him some books to which he refers thus:

"I received a complete collection of the sayings of Ramakrishna from his own pupil, Vivekananda. I give them as they were sent to me, with such corrections only as seem absolutely necessary."

### *The First Indians Who Reached Europe*

By the time Swamiji had reached Europe religion had suffered an eclipse. He was there towards the close of the nineteenth century while Dwarkanath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy visited the European Continent in the

## LALA LAJPAT RAI AND ROLLAND

Only 16 years after the British had annexed the Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai was born in the village of Dhudike, near Jagraon, Ludhiana. His parents were, as young Punjabis, the citizens of a free state. He died a martyr in 1928 and only 19 years later India obtained her freedom. He was not destined to see a free India.

*Dayananda's Influence*

Very early in his life Lalaji came under the influence of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. The day this young man was enlisted as a member of that institution social workers in Lahore were overwhelmed with joy. He was indeed a valuable acquisition.

Lajpat Rai had the gift of the gab. He was a renowned lawyer and yet did not hesitate to give up his profession when he realized that his services were required elsewhere.

The Punjab was not as vast a field as would absorb the energy of a leader of his calibre. Bengal had been partitioned. A movement had been set afoot. The country had Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal and Lajpat Rai, the Lion of the Punjab, to inspire it. It is this group that became famous as the trinity known by the name of Lal-Bal-Pal.

*The Lion of India*

Rai was henceforth not the pride of the Punjab alone but the whole of India. A more appropriate surname than *The Lion of the Punjab* was *The Lion of India*.

## MAHATMA GANDHI AS OVERSEAS INDIANS SEE HIM

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire and elsewhere created the demand for Indian labour in the colonies.

The first Indian emigrants went out to the French island of Réunion in 1830. Four years later Mauritius began to receive Indian immigrants.

There was no desire in the Indian immigrant to see new lands. He had been duped. The recruiting agent had told him in the Indian bazar that in the colonies he would shake the pagoda tree.

Little did he know that he would be made to replace the slaves that had been manumitted. He was virtually in a prison.

Mahatma Gandhi was a liberator. As soon as he reached Africa he threw in his lot with the immigrants.

The first immigrants that the European colonies had received came from Kerala, Pondicherry and Chandranagore. Mahatmaji had to pick up Tamil to make himself understood or rather to understand his countrymen.

### *The Famous Gandhi Cap*

He soon got into trouble, went to prison. There it occurred to him that the prison life of the immigrant must on no account be forgotten. The prisoner's cap became the famous Gandhi cap. As long as this head-gear is preserved, an episode of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle will be remembered.

The immigrant was illiterate. Everyone who came into contact with him tried, like Mahatmaji, to under-

## ACHARYA VINOBA AND SOUL-FORCE

King Duryodhana would not make a gift of a village each to the five Pandavas, his cousins. Krishna interceded to no purpose.

Whenever Delhi fails to give satisfaction or is not up to the mark one is put in mind of Duryodhana's misdeed.

The man of liberality is praised in India. The Veda likens him to the scholar who speaks:

"The riches of the liberal never waste away, while he who will not give finds none to comfort him.

The man with food in store who, when the needy comes in miserable case begging for bread to eat,

Hardens his heart against him—even when of old he did him service—finds not one to comfort him.

No friend is he who to his friend and comrade who comes imploring food, will offer nothing...

Let the rich satisfy the poor implorer, and bend his eye upon a longer pathway.

Riches come now to one, now to another, and like the wheels of cars are ever rolling.

The ploughshare ploughing makes the food that feeds us, and with its feet cuts through the path it follows.

Better the speaking than the silent brahman: the liberal friend outvalues him who gives not."

A similar idea is the one we borrow from the Bible, another religious work:

"For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not: St. Matthew, XXV. 42, 43."

These words could have been uttered on the eve of the *Mahabharata*.

## APPENDIX I

### MAURITIUS CASTS A SPELL OVER RABINDRANATH

In 1961,<sup>1</sup> the Tagore Centenary Year, articles and books without number on Tagore, the Man and the Poet, were being written.

We of Mauritius were honouring the boy over whom the Isle of France or French Mauritius (1715-1810) cast a spell.

A century or so before Rabindranath's birth Bernardin de Saint-Pierre landed here and stayed for three years (1768-1770), seeing men and things. And he had an observant eye.

He wrote *Voyage à l'Île de France* which prepared the way for the famous novel *Paul and Virginia*. Not only the novel but the *Voyage* too was at once translated into English. The *Voyage*<sup>2</sup> is the first comprehensive history of Mauritius that Englishmen came to read. Let it be added that it was as comprehensive as a history could be in those days.

The delicious novel *Paul and Virginia* is among the first novels written in Europe. It appeared in 1788, a year before the French Revolution.

European works were being translated into Bengali. The Vernacular Literature Society came into being right in the middle of the nineteenth century, or, to be precise, in 1851, exactly a decade before Gurudev's birth. Messrs. Bethune and Joy Krishna Mookerjee were its patrons.

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<sup>1</sup> See the "Calcutta Review" of February, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> *A Voyage To The Island of Mauritius...* the Isle of Bourbon, the Cape of Good Hope, etc., with Observations and Reflections upon Nature and Mankind, translated by J. Parish, *First English Edition*, 1775.

Includes three letters on trees, flowers and fruits, pp. 271-291.

## APPENDIX II

### A CHAPTER FROM A BIOGRAPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

With Swami Shraddhananda of the Kangri Gurukula fame, Devendranath Tagore who was so anxious to see his Shantiniketan grow that he offered to hand it over to the Vedic scholar Swami Nityanand who was, in Justice Ranade's judgment, a 'gifted preacher', and Gandhi, the ashram became a feature of Indian life. There was a meeting of Modern India and the India of the Rishis in the ashrams of these noble sons of Mother Ind.

Sri Aurobindo's Ashram at once became a centre of attraction.

To enable the reader to know what was the atmosphere in India at the time Aurobindo, the Mahayogi, was to make his appearance, we cull the following from a biography of this great son of Bengal:

"Sri Aurobindo had followed the Indian political movement even when he was in England, and his close study of it had revealed to him the fundamental weakness it was labouring under...

The latter half of the eighteenth century saw the Indian nation almost prostrate in the dust—its spirituality smouldering under an inert mass of dead and deadening formalism, the main-spring of its life corroded by rust, its vitality at a low ebb, and its vision narrowed and clouded. It had ceased to think creatively...

Describing the then state of the country, Rabindranath says: "...our country having lost its link with the inmost truths of its being struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the realms of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity."

## APPENDIX III

### Dr. SCHWEITZER PASSES AWAY<sup>1</sup>

Melancholy interest attaches to the first chapter of the present work. Dr. Albert Schweitzer is no more.

This little book opens with a refutation of the sympathetic and kind doctor's opinion on Tagore.

He was the right man to measure swords with the Indian poet. Both were stalwarts.

To us Indians, his selflessness was a reminder of that of Bapuji.

If Mahatmaji spent two decades and more serving the disinherited Indians, Chinese and Coloureds of South Africa, Dr. Schweitzer spent a comparatively longer period, half a century in another part of the African continent "tending Africans in a jungle clearing and turning his back on civilization."

He was born on the 14th January, a date when Indians celebrate the Makar Sankranti Festival. The good doctor was only 6 years the junior of Mahatmaji who was born in 1969.

He shared with the average Indian the love of the Ashram life. "Amid a cluster of palm-roofed huts he began his work in an old, only partially covered hen-house hurriedly whitewashed, which he used as an operating theatre. He renounced Western civilisation."

If a whole chapter has not been devoted to him in this work at least a lengthy reference will be found in an appendix. Dr. Schweitzer deserves to be thus referred to for another reason also. He is one of those French writers who have unhesitatingly written with un-

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<sup>1</sup> For further details read: "Reverence for Life"—*Albert Schweitzer*, a Bhavan's book.

derstanding about India and the Indians. It is a matter for regret that when condolence meetings were held and obituary notices written in September, 1965, no mention was made of his important book entitled *Les Grands penseurs de l'Inde*. *The Manchester Guardian Weekly* alluded to another work of his that is equally important:

“His internment saw the beginning of his third great book, ‘The Philosophy of Civilisation,’ a work as scholarly as it is original, in which he traced the roots of decay in the modern world and expounded the remedy in terms of ‘Reverence for Life’...”

Dr. Schweitzer won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1962. “When he learned of this award, he said: ‘I owe it to the fact of having introduced into the thought of our times the notion of respect for life. It was here, at Lamberene, that I discovered its importance. I am convinced that the idea will contribute to the growth of a spiritual and moral civilisation on which peace and the future of humanity depend’.”

He spoke as a Nobel Prize winner in the hall of Oslo University. He said: “The trouble with the modern world is that men do not have the super-human reason to balance their superhuman power. A new ethical mentality based on humanitarianism is needed if they are not to use the forces at their disposal for devastating purposes.”

The good doctor passed away on 5-9-1965 “the way he wanted among lepers.” He was born in 1875. He was a sponsor of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. The 93-year-old philosopher Lord Russell said: “Genuinely good men are uncommon. Our age... certainly does not deserve them. Dr. Schweitzer was both a good and dedicated man.”

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# BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

## CONSTITUENT INSTITUTIONS

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### MUMBADEVI SANSKRIT MAHAVIDYALAYA

An Oriental College teaching Sanskrit and Shastras by traditional methods for Shastri and Acharya (recognised as equivalent to B.A. & M.A. respectively) and for Vachaspati (research).

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An Academy for the study of Indian Culture with special reference to the Bhagavad Gita.

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**Singhi Jain Series:** Critical editions of ancient works and manuscripts connected with Jain religion and literature. Published volumes 52.

**The Glory that was Gurjaradesa:** A comprehensive study of Gujarat in 7 volumes. Published volumes 2.

**Munshi Sahitya:** Social novels, historical plays, biographical works of Munshi and Smt. Lilavati Munshi in Gujarati and English, the copyright whereof has been kindly gifted by them to the Bhavan. Published volumes 80.

## **JOURNALS**

**Bharatiya Vidya:** An Indological research quarterly in English started in 1943. Published volumes 22.

**Bhavan's Journal:** An English Fortnightly devoted to life, literature and culture started in August 1954. Present circulation 50,000 copies. Annual Subscription Rs. 6.50.

**Bharati:** A Hindi Fortnightly started in August 1956. Annual Subscription Rs. 6.50.

**Samarpan:** A Gujarati Fortnightly started in November 1959. Annual Subscription Rs. 6.50.

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The Academy teaches four foreign languages, viz., German, Russian, French and Spanish.

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### THE AUTHOR

Prof. Basdeo Bissoondoyal is one of the five million Indians known in India as *Indians Overseas*.

The ancestor of his who gave the name "Vishnudayal" (wrongly spelt "Bissoondoyal" nowadays) to the family, left Bihar after the First War of Independence had been fought in 1857, and went out to Mauritius Island, situated in the Indian Ocean.

The Professor was born in South Mauritius in 1906. After serving for more than a decade in the Schools Department, he left for India where he stayed from 1933 to 1939. He obtained the M.A. degree of the Calcutta University and was for some time on the staff of a National University. He returned home in December, 1939.

He has been all along writing for such famous periodicals as *The Contemporary Review*, *France-Asie*, *Unesco Features*, *The Calcutta Review*, *The Hindusthan Review*, *Indo-Asian Culture*, *The March of India*, *Madhuri*, *Saraswati*, *The Indian Review*, *Sanskrit Bhavitavyam*, *The Modern Review*, etc.

He has some important books to his credit, one being *Hindu Scriptures*, another *Les Hindous* and a third *Eternal India*.

Writing for *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bal Ghan-shyam makes the right estimate of this eminent Mauritian when he states: "In Basdeo Bissoondoyal, Mauritius has a writer of international fame."

In the present work which is, in a sense, a short history of Contemporary India, the author gives interesting details on Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Lala Lajpat Rai, Sant Vinoba, Gurudev Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.