



Dr. Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, a litterateur, politician, statesman and lawyer, was a man who believed in the cultural prowess of India and had unwavering faith in its future. On 7th November 1938, he established the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, an organisation promoting universal education and the study of languages. It was a fountain of eternal knowledge based upon universal values, which absorbed noble thoughts from all sources, irrespective of region, religion or race. Former President of India and founder-member Dr. S. Radhakrishnan described the institution as the “greatest monument to his life”.

Kanhaiyalal Munshi completed a Bachelor of Arts at Baroda College in 1907. At the college, he was influenced by the ideas of professors and philosopher Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. When Munshi came to Bombay from Baruch to further his career, he was 20 years old and nearly penniless (Ramkrishnan). In 1910, he earned an LLB degree in Mumbai and became a registered lawyer in the Bombay High Court.



Munshi was a forerunner of the Indian Cultural Renaissance, which Raja Ram Mohan Roy pioneered in Bengal in the 19th century. His political independence was just a step towards Sampurna Swaraj or sovereignty. He believed that without liberating the cultural spirit of India, which had been subjugated for centuries under the rule of diverse races, India was not truly independent.

He said, “The Egypt of the Pharaohs, the Greece of Pericles, the Iran of Darius and the Rome of Caesar are all dead; their life and culture are mere materials for scholarly research. But India had stood the shocks of time. Manu, Buddha, Panini, Bhasa and Kautilya are still living influences operating on life; Sri Krishna’s exhortation to Arjuna still inspires the thought, hope and conduct of millions” (Raghavan 2021). He quickly realised that a large part of the history and culture of India was documented by foreigners who played no role in the same. Under the aegis of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, he commissioned a magnum opus, granting the general editorship of Sri Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, known as the Dean of Indian Historians. The result was an ambitious book, The History and Culture of the Indian People, in eleven volumes (Raghavan, Kulapati Dr. K.M. Munshi: Architect Of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan & Father Of Indian Cultural Renaissance 2021).

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s earliest departments were Sanskrit, Comparative Philology, Prakrit languages, Gujarati, Hindi, Indian History and Bhagavat Dharma. The period from 1943 to 1947 saw a significant expansion of activities at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, such as the endowment of the Singhi Jain Series and Library. In 1944, the Bharatiya Itihas Wing was established, followed by the initiation of the Gita Vidyalaya and the introduction of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s examinations in Sanskrit and Gita in 1945. The Munshi Saraswati Mandir was inaugurated in 1947, featuring diverse cultural activities such as the Library, Sangit Shikshapith, and Kala Kendra.

A new building at the junction of Pandita Ramabai Road, previously Harvey Road, was built in 1949 as a Central Home for the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Considering the growing activities at the Bhavan, it was built in two years and three months and cost over 18,00,000 rupees. The Governor-General of India, H. E. C. Rajagopalachari, during his speech at the inauguration of the new building of Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan in Mumbai on 8th August 1949, said, “The universities must give the nation the leaders. Teachers and administrators are required in this complicated age to fulfil the duties devolving on the state and to guide society in its cultural life.” K. M. Munshi also spoke at the inaugural event as the Founder and President. He said, “I and my colleagues, who had been working hard for the last ten years for the institution, propose to work harder still, for we have faith in Bharat and her ageless culture lives, India will live. If it dies, India dies with it” (Chronicle 1949).

With monumental efforts, Munshi Sadan, formerly known as the Central Home, played a pivotal role in causing a cultural renaissance in India, emerging as the hub of cultural activities in Bombay. Librarian Smt. Anjali Ambekar states that the Munshi Sadan presently houses the “Munshi Saraswati Mandir Granthagar”, earlier the private library of the founder. It opened to the public in 1947 and has become one of the leading libraries in Mumbai today, with a collection of over 100,000 books and bound volumes of journals in Gujarati, Sanskrit, English, Hindi and Marathi. The collection covers a range of subjects, such as literature, history and culture, biographies, religion, philosophy, art and architecture.

Recognised today as an Institution of National Eminence by the Government of India, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is known as an apolitical Non-Governmental Organisation fighting against all religious differences, regional prejudices and social discrimination. Somewhere in the quiet corridors of history, a man quite ahead of his time dreamt of a resurgence where India would once again ascend as the Vishwa Guru, a beacon of wisdom and grace on the global stage not just in terms of might, but one that embodied the profound ideals of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the belief that the world is one family.

As the headlines chronicled the success of India’s triumphant G20 Presidency in 2023, one could feel the emotional resonance of K.M. Munshi’s prophecy. The country did not just showcase itself as a potent political force but also as a symbol of unity, compassion, and cultural richness. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan stands as a living testament to his dreams. The foundation of a global family was laid here, a family bound not by geographical boundaries but by shared values, aspirations, and a collective vision for a harmonious world.

#### References:

*Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan*. Accessed 30th December 2023. <https://www.bhavans.info/about-bhavan/about-bhavan.php>.

*Chronicle, The Bombay*. “Nation Needs Many Men of Character - Governor General on the Role of Universities (Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan’s New Building Opened)”. *The Bombay Chronicle*, 9th August 1949.

*Raghavan, K.G.* “134th Birthday Wishes To Kulapati Dr. K.M. Munshi”. *Mysore*, 30th December 2021. Accessed 26th December 2023. <https://starofmysore.com/134th-birthday-wishes-to-kulapati-dr-k-m-munshi/>.

*Raghavan, K.G.* “Kulapati Dr. K.M. Munshi: Architect Of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan & Father Of Indian Cultural Renaissance”. *Star of Mysore*. *Mysore*, 31st December 2021. Accessed 27th December 2023. <https://starofmysore.com/kulapati-dr-k-m-munshi-architect-of-bharatiya-vidya-bhavan-father-of-indian-cultural-renaissance/>.

*Ramkrishnan, S. n.d.* *Kulapati Munshi - The Man And His Mission*. Accessed 22nd December 2023. <https://www.bhavans.info/about-bhavan/munshi-man-mission.php>.

