Sanyassi Bhawani Dayal, the son of an indentured labourer, had made such an outstanding contribution to his countrymen in South Africa that he deserves a place in South African Indian History.

C. F. Andrews, the great and sincere friend of India and Indians abroad said that Bhawani Dayal "has been of the greatest service not only to the Indian community in South Africa where he has lived for 26 years but also to the Indians overseas in other parts of the world."

Born in Johannesburg on September 10, 1892 Dayal received his early English education in the St. Cyprian's School and Wesleyan Methodist School. Apart from English he made a keen study of Hindi in a private school.

His father was Jairam Singh, ex-president of the Transvaal British Association. He left South Africa in 1904 and spent a period of 8½ years in India. It was during this period that he took part in the Swadeshi movement, urging people to boycott British goods.

In 1910 he married Shrimati Jagrani Devi. While in India he became deeply interested in religion and was made an honorary preacher by the age of 18. He also became the assistant editor of the Aryasartha, a monthly magazine.

When his father died in 1911 he gave up his entire estate to his stepmother and returned to Natal in the S. S. Palamcotta. On his arrival the Passive Resistance Campaign, organised by the late Mr M. K. Gandhi, was well on the way. Both Bhawani Dayal and his wife got into the thick of it. Both served several terms of imprisonment for "courting arrest" by illegal hawking and inciting labourers to go on strike.

Gandhi welcomed him as the editor of the Hindi section of the Indian Opinion, a position he relinquished in 1914. Thereafter he engaged himself in the propagation of the Hindi language and succeeded in the formation of the Hindi Pracharini Sabhas and Hindi Schools at Germiston, Newcastle, Dannhauser, Hattingspruit, Glencoe, Burnside, Ladysmith, Weenen and Jacobs, and a Hindi Ashram consisting of a school and library at Clare Estate, in the vicinity of Durban.

He also organised the first and second South African Hindi Literary Conferences in Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg respectively. It was during this period that he did a lot of writing. He wrote his first book Dakshin Afrika Ke Satyagraha Kath Thas (History of Passive Resistance in South Africa) in 1914, which was published in 1916 in India.

Bhawani Dayal paid his second visit to India in 1919. He represented South African Indians at the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Amritsar. It was here that he narrated "the painful story" concerning the overseas Indians. In 1922 he also attended the session at Gaya where he was instrumental in getting the Natal Indian Congress, Transvaal British Association and the Cape British Indian Council to send 10 delegates annually to the meetings of the National Congress.

On his return to South Africa he played an important role in the reviving of the Natal Indian Congress and he was elected to the post of Vice-president, an office which he occupied till May 1, 1938 when he was elected president.

Swamiji performed the opening ceremony of the Aryan Benevolent Home at Mayville in 1921, an institution founded by the Arya Yuvak Sabha. In 1925, when it was decided to celebrate the centenary of Rishi Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj in South Africa, Swamiji was elected as the president of the Rishi Dayanand Centenary Celebrations Committee of South Africa. On this very occasion the Natal Arya Pratinidhi Sabha was formed and Swamiji was elected its first president. He also presided over the Vedic Conference that was held in Ladysmith.

In 1927, Swamiji was formally admitted into the order of Sannyasis and thereafter devoted two complete years in propagation of Arya Samajic principles in South Africa on behalf of the Sarvadeshik Sabha of Delhi. During this period he wrote a number of articles in the Sarvadeshik, the monthly magazine of the League, concerning Arya Samaj in foreign lands. In 1934, he was again elected president of the Natal Arya Pratinidhi Sabha for the second time and under his able control and guidance the Semi-Centenary of the death of Rishi Dayanand was celebrated with great success. On this occasion a Hindu Conference was also convened, which was unique in the history of Arya Samaj in South Africa. This conference was also presided over by the Swamiji.

In 1925 at a congress held in Cape Town it was resolved to send a deputation to India to seek the intervention of the Government of India against the Areas Reservation Bill. The Deputation was to consist of seven prominent leaders, one of them was Swami Bhawani Dayal, others were Dr. Abdurahman, Mr Sorabjee Rustomjee, Advocate J. W. Godfrey, Mr Amod Bayat, Mr V. S. C. Pather and Mr A. A. Mirza. Swamiji accompanied the deputation after having suspended the publication of his weekly journal...
"The Hindi".

Swamiji also acted as representative of the Natal Indian Congress in investigating and distributing the relief money to the dependants of Indian victims in the Dannhauser Colliery disaster. In 1928, an Indian Education Commission was appointed in Natal by the effort of the Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri, the then Agent-General of India. The Indian Government deputed Mr Kailas Prasad Kitchlu, an educational expert from India, to study prepare and present the case of the Indians before this Commission. Swami Bhawani Dayal toured the north coast of Natal with Mr Kitchlu and Miss G. Gordon, and helped them in collecting the information concerning Indian education. Swamiji was also elected as one of the representatives to give evidence before the Commission on behalf of the Natal Indian Congress.

It was in 1920 that the Asiatic Inquiry Commission suggested a new scheme of repatriation for the Indians in South Africa. In those days, the government of Natal was against the new scheme of repatriation. At the time of repatriation, Swamiji vigorously opposed the new scheme of repatriation. He returned to South Africa in 1929, he was asked to inquire into the condition of repatriated Indians living in different parts of India. He spent nearly three months on this work, visiting Bombay, several places in the United Provinces, Bihar, Calcutta and its suburbs, and Madras. He interviewed hundreds of repatriates and witnessed the neglected conditions under which they lived.

He issued an interim report in February 1930, requesting the Government of India to appoint a commission of inquiry. In April 1930 the Indian Government did appoint a committee with Mr G. A. Natesan and Mr J. Grey as members, to make an inquiry into the working of the special organisation in Madras for dealing with emigrants returning to the Presidency from South Africa under the scheme of assisted emigration and to make recommendations.

Swamiji published his report on May 15, 1931, which was popularly known as A Report on the Emigrants repatriated to India under the Assisted Emigration Scheme from South Africa and on the Problem of Returned Emigrants from all Colonies. This report created a stir in India and abroad, having received the attention of practically all the leading journals and statesmen. Swamiji collected, as far as possible, the opinions of the Press, and published another book entitled Public Opinion on the Assisted Emigration Scheme under Indo South African Agreement. This report was the main point of issue at the second Round Table Conference, between India and South Africa, which was held in the beginning of 1932.

Bhawani Dayal made numerous trips to India. In 1931 he presided at the All India Hindi Journalists' Conference in Calcutta. In 1935 he was invited to address the National Indian Congress at Lucknow on the position of the Indians overseas.

He returned to South Africa in 1936 and decided to keep aloof from politics and concentrate on writing. But this war not to be for he plunged once more into politics as a result of his election as the President of the Natal Indian Congress in 1938. He left South Africa once again by the S.S. Takiwla and arrived in Bombay on March 1939 to attend the Imperial Citizenship Association Conference.

In 1941 he decided to build an ashram at the already established Pravasi-Bhagwan, a school consisting of a fine library and providing free education.

In 1947 he was offered a ministerial post in the Government of India. He refused the post on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi who felt that his participation in politics will clash with his religious principles.

In 1951, a year after his death, a statue of him was unveiled by Vijaylaxmi Pandit (Nehru's sister) at ADARSH NAGAR AJMER RAJASTHAN. His important literary works were "My Experiences of South Africa, Story of My Prison-Life", Biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Indians in the Transvaal, Natalian Hindu, Vedic Religion and Aryan Culture, Educator and Cultivator, The Vedic Prayer.

"Swami Bhawani Dayal will go down in the history as a builder of Greater India.

When the history of Indians overseas is written, he would rank as one of the foremost workers for having devoted all his life to this particular cause. His name will be recorded in golden letters in the history of greater India."