

The Raj In Retrospect

WHEN Sir Penderel Moon's *magnum opus* was first published in London a few years ago, it won instant acclaim. It was the first work of its kind to review Britain's conquest and dominion of India in a majestic sweep with a smooth flow of narration of the events interspersed with the author's comments; a record and a retrospect. The fact that the two-volume set was expensively priced severely limited its circulation in India. An enterprising new firm of publishers has now brought out an Indian edition at less than half the original price without compromising on the quality of printing and get up.

One of the most distinguished members of the Indian Civil Service, Penderel Moon won the respect of all who knew him or of him. His "indiscreet criticisms" of the government led to his resignation from the ICS in 1943. Back in England, he wrote a monograph *The Future of India* and a biography of Warren Hastings. He was a Fellow of All Souls at Oxford. But, as David M Blake notes in his brief memoir, "at bottom Moon preferred action to contemplation". He was a gentleman scholar, not a disciplined academic. He returned to India in April 1947 to serve in the Bahawalpur state. After independence, he was appointed Chief Commissioner, Himachal Pradesh and, later, of Manipur; he became as well Adviser to the Planning Commission. After retirement from India, he returned to All Souls, wrote extensively and held important posts.

This work reflects a liberal British view of the Raj. It is written, not by a scholar with rigorous analyses and meticulous research, but by a civil servant of an academic bent of mind. It compels admiration for its remarkable sweep, the overview of the Raj, some flashes of insight, and its elegant style. It must be assessed at its true worth which is considerable. His erstwhile colleague, EN Mangat Rai,



should provoke reflection and research on that phase of our history. All in all, the work is no small achievement. The flaws brook no neglect, either.

Moon states his thesis at the outset in the Introduction. "How was it possible for a mere handful of foreigners from a distant land to make themselves masters of a large sub-continent, the inhabitants of which numbered many millions?" he asks and proceeds to answer the question. The virtual collapse of the Moghul empire in the first half of the 18th century gave the British

the day were adventurers and upstarts, whose authority rested on mercenary troops. "Although there was in India an ancient and distinguished culture, there was no nation or nations".

The British stepped in with little thought of building an empire. "Most of the population of all races and religions accepted the change with indifference; and British rule soon proved to be on the whole milder and more well-intentioned than any that could be remembered".

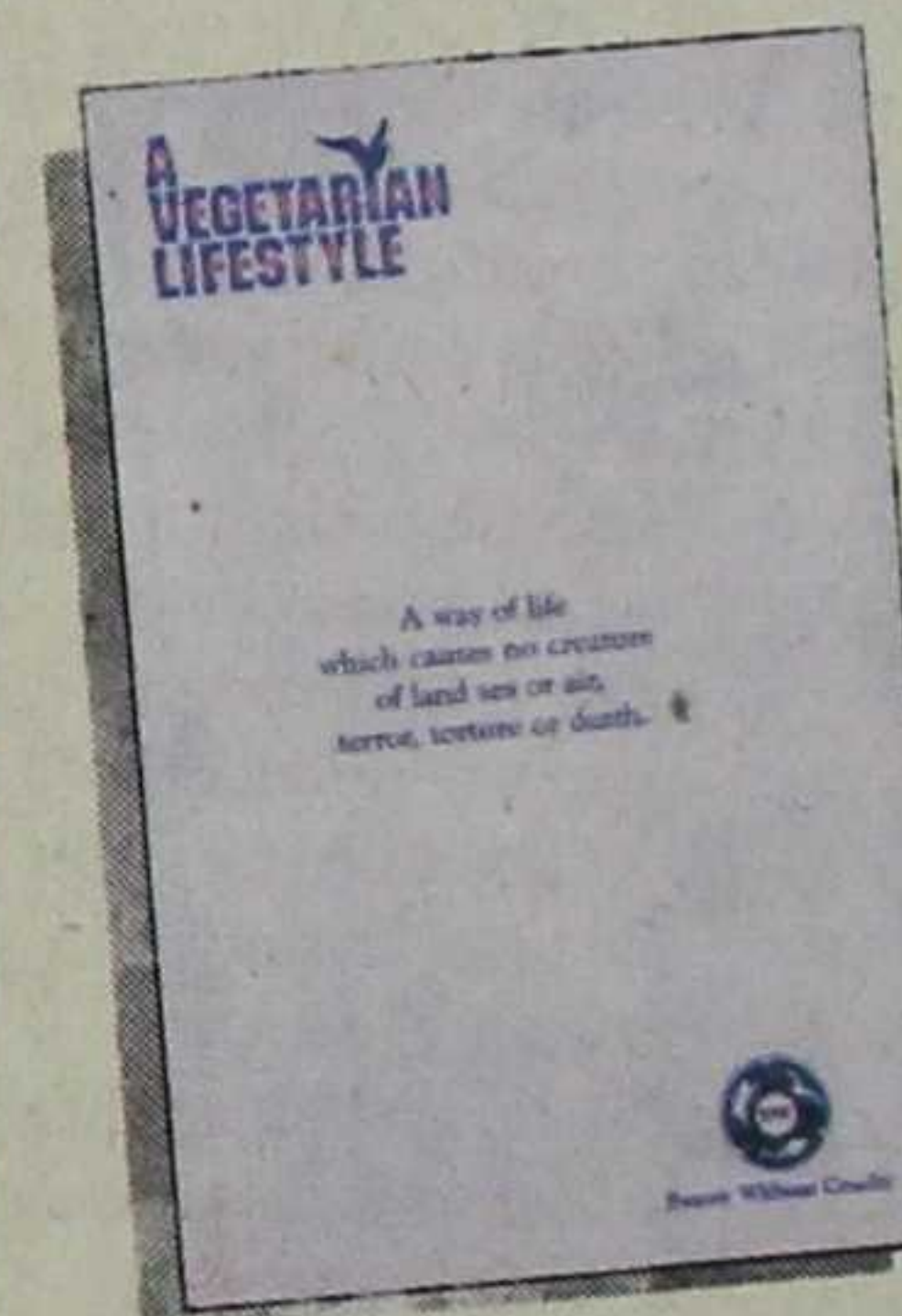
This sets the tone for the book. Warren Hastings is

Wajid Ali Shah is dismissed as "an effeminate young man as frivolous and irresponsible as any of his predecessors ... he fancied himself as a poet and a musician". Censures at notorious British crimes are adroitly mild. Hodson's wanton murder of the last Moghul Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, "has been condemned as a brutal and unnecessary outrage, but it was in keeping with the spirit of the time and was widely approved". Really?

There is a similar laboured attempt at minimising the gravity of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The official Hunter Committee, we are told, was "on many issues divided on racial lines" with not a word on the conduct of the European members which pro-

THE BRITISH CONQUEST AND DOMINION OF INDIA, 2 vols.
By Sir Penderel Moon
India Research Press, Rs 1,800

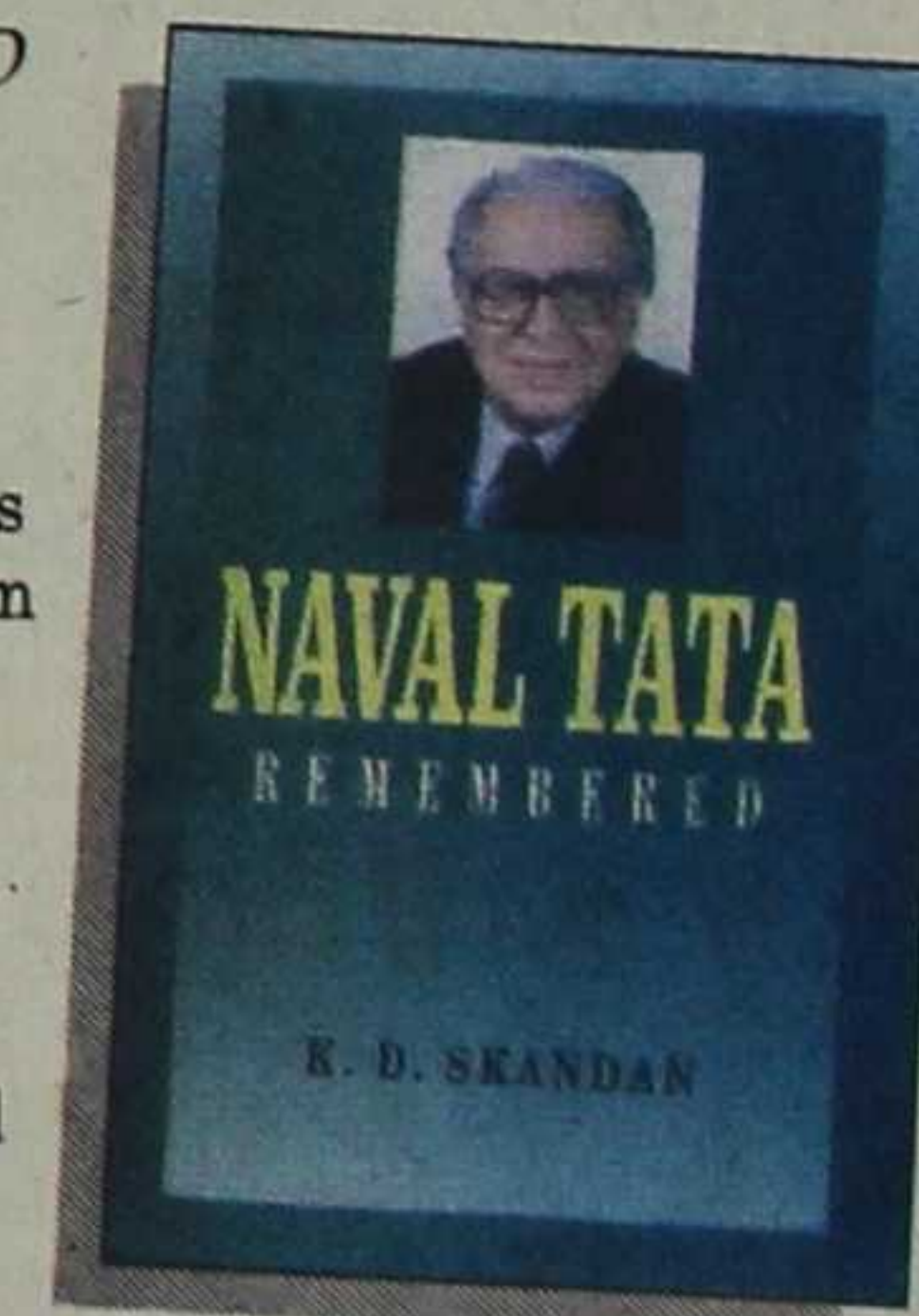
New Arrivals



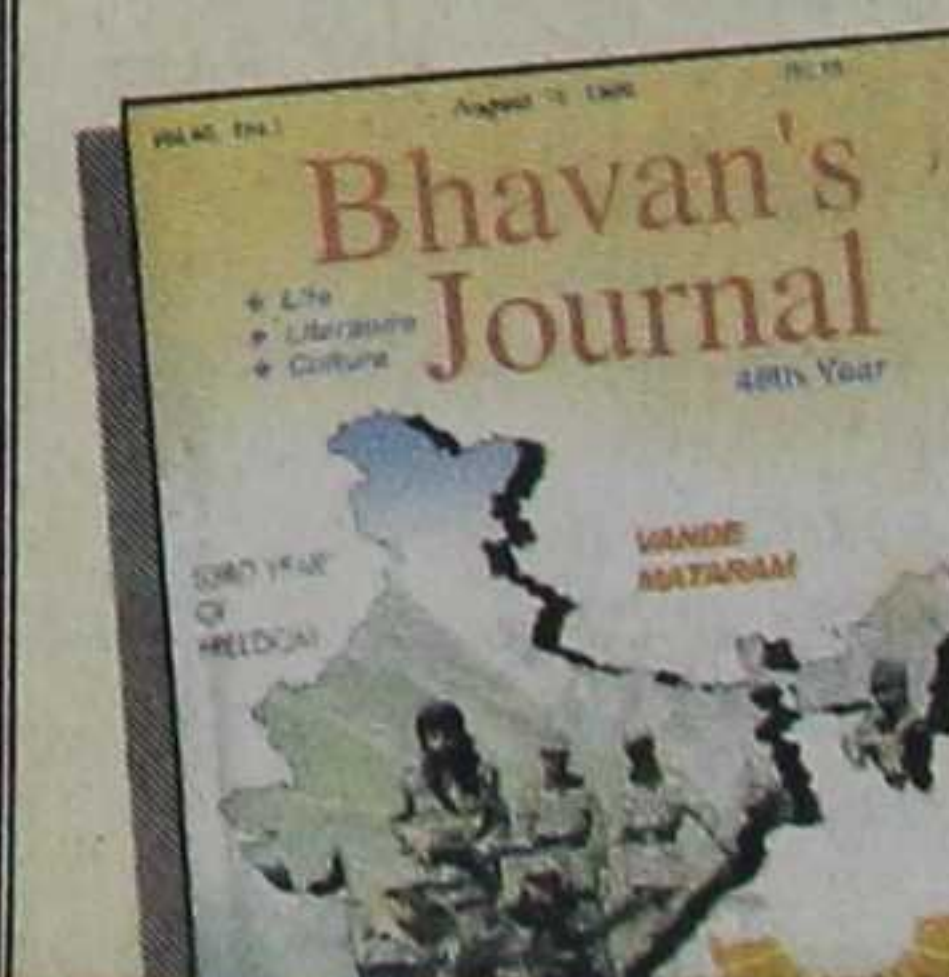
A VEGETARIAN LIFESTYLE
By Diana Ratnagar and Ranjit Konkar,
Beauty without Cruelty-India,
Price not stated

BEAUTY without cruelty — an animal rights organisation has brought out this book in celebration of the 25th year of their foundation. The aim mainly is to show how man can live in complete harmony with nature without killing animals and other living creatures for food. But the book does not stop at food only but recommends its readers to adopt it as a complete lifestyle. This can be done by buying products or ingredients totally free from cruelty to animals when they are being processed.

NAVAL TATA REMEMBERED
By K D Skandan
M & J Services, Rs 50



THE author has worked with the Tatas for nearly 30 years and considers Naval Tata a "gem among human beings". This compilation which includes an article by Naval Tata himself, written in 1987, is meant to be a tribute to a man who began his career as despatch clerk and assistant secretary in the Tata organisation in 1930 and rose to occupy topmost positions in administration and management and had numerous honours bestowed on him. The book records the highlights of Naval Tata's career.



BHAVAN'S JOURNAL
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Rs 15

IN its 46th year, Bhavan's Journal has acquired several new features both in content and appearance. There is a section on Kashmir that offers the views of Gandhiji, Nehru and Vajpayee. C Subramaniam discusses the tasks facing the scientific community. N A