INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the art of winning. It is the art of wooing people, captivating them, and realizing their tremendous potential when they work in Unism for a cause—be it political, religious or institutional. These all have a common denominator—The cause.1 Food for the hungry, home for the homeless, cloth for the naked; freedom for all and honour and glory for the best and who solves the problems of the people will lead them. This leader Mrs. Annie Besant was a woman of ideas, receptive and corrigible willing to try a new idea in place of old. This leader was a woman of perception who grasps the complexities of the situation. She had the wits and intelligence to out rank the man of those days.

She was a lady of action who does not let the grass grow under her feet. She was swift and deft. Her every action generates the impact and effect that all and sundry cannot visualize. She had also had a taste for grandeur. She was a lady of wisdom, the nucleus of the wise and intelligent of the land.2 She was a born pragmatist who never lost her thoughts to action and action to thoughts. She was also a gifted orator, whose words were a torrent of power. Her words go straight to the listeners’ hearts and premate there; they have the flint of fire that kindles and glows from within.

1. Sunny Thomas, Woman of Destiny, New Delhi, 1979, p.5.
2. Ibid., p.9.
She was also a leader with the qualities of a persuasive talker who can change people to her views. She had genuine love for people. She was a leader who solves the problem of her people. She was the prophet of her time whose awareness surpasses that of her contemporaries. She had also in her the basic qualities of a leader, the ability to speak, ability to think, ability to write, ability to draw crowds and the ability to act.

There are many gifted women in India - writers, artists, musicians, philosophers, politicians, scientists and social workers who can hold their own against all competitors. They had emerged from the troubled society to regulate the confused society as saviours. This sort of women had been pointed out by Thomas Carlyle as “Heroes” or according to Dharmic View as “Avatar”. One among them was Mrs. Annie Besant. She had left behind, her imprints on the sands of time. Like all energetic reformers she aroused the hatred of the dominant class because she attacked the hardships and injustices of the prevailing system - a social order. Mrs. Annie Besant was the enemy par excellence. She rejected current theology. She battled to improve a lot of the poor and oppressed. She organized trade unions to press for better pay and conditions for exploited workers. She fought for the equality of men and women. She campaigned for birth control to limit the size of impoverished families. She was a world figure, but it was our good fortune that her later years were spent in India. Without ceasing to be a

world citizen, she identified herself with this country. She was of a magnetic personality. She was always called as "Amma" by her true followers, they will not mention her name before her, very nearly consider her a Goddess. No one to-day can claim a fraction of her vision, her comprehension and wisdom, let alone her superb oratorical gifts, it is the duty of everyone of us to attempt an objective analysis of the various factors that have led the world to its present pass and see how far India can play the part which Mrs. Annie Besant had visualized for her. She expected a free India to impart a spiritual impulse to the new civilization. Her consuming love for the people of India, her spiritual wisdom, her wonderful genius and magnificent oratory attracted people from all over the world.

The teachings, experience, knowledge and philosophy of Mrs. Annie Besant in diverse fields resemble the work of Swami Dyanand, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Though she was an alien, she toiled with zest to free the Indians from the manacles of the foreign rule. Mrs. Annie Besant came to India when the public life was benighted with social evils like infanticide, child marriages, offering girls to deity, illiteracy etc. In such a gloomy condition, she brought bright light by dedicating her life to the upliftment of Indians.

5. Ibid., p.8.
She began her life as a devout Christian but her rational and inquisitive mind could not reconcile itself to the dogmas and bigotry which she encountered. By the time she started her public life, she was a free thinker, and a feminist who fought for the rights of women, a socialist of the Fabian Society. She preached birth control, taught science and was a social and educational reformer as well\(^6\). However, her vision, her courage of conviction and her wisdom had made her to choose India for a worthy role which she had visualized for her to play\(^7\). Mrs. Annie Besant not only did she make this land as her home but also declared to the world at a time when India was low down in the scale of Nations, that this was her holy land from which she drew her own inspiration and that India had to be served so that she might come to her own and she once more be the teacher and guide of Mankind.

Her varied activities covered all departments of national life, and in a most practical manner, she started on her great mission of rousing from their slumber a great and ancient people and making them fit to look after their own affairs so that their country could regain its individuality, and they thus enabled to make their own contribution to world thought and world endeavour as a free and respected people, politically, economically and culturally.

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6. Ibid., p.10.
7. Ibid., p.12.
When she first came to India and decide to adopt India as her motherland, she saw the ideal behind the actual even when the actual had deteriorated. For her, India was the land of the Dharma, of the loftiest concepts of philosophy and religion of the sages and saints of the past, venerated by the populace⁸. She was striving to win for India her political freedom as a member of the British Commonwealth. She always used to say “Let not success be marred by excess”.

Her Home Rule Movement aroused the minds of people all over this sub-continent, and prepared them to later under other leaders. She stimulated the social consciousness of the Indian public by her brilliant lectures and the organisations she founded and supported. Moreover she enunciated new principles of education which remain valid today for rising worthy generations of Indian citizens. Her contribution to India’s freedom was truly tremendous. People like Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar and many others were influenced by her. She was elected as the president of the Indian National Congress, which goes to show the high esteem in which she was held by all those engaged in the freedom struggle. A burning love of freedom was one of her characteristics. Another quality was her undaunted courage and fearlessness in the face of danger. Her entire life was a model of whole hearted devotion to truth as she found it, of resolute sincerity and courage. She implanted the seeds of self-

⁸. Ibid., p.287.
respect in this land of slaves of government and tradition. Theosophy was her religion but humanity her surging passion.

The freedom movement of Mrs. Annie Besants’ Conception was one in which India would be at liberty to frame her own constitution in accordance with her traditions and genius; but a freedom which was to be in partnership and friendship with the other units of the British Commonwealth. It is true that Mrs. Annie Besant did not live to see India free, as frequently she had expressed a longing to it. But everything she proclaimed her life time has come true, though after a great deal of suffering.

She was always attracted by many organisations that had for its aim the elevation of humanity and she remained at heart a reformer although, as we have seen. Theosophy had brought a new consideration into her attitude. She founded Home Rule Leagues, Swadeshi bazaars, organisations of the Sons and Daughters of India, schools and colleges in order to implement her programme and give her fiery words concrete shape and form. Mrs. Annie Besant in her own way in the then existing state of affairs helped in raising the age of marriage; in bringing education to girls and women, in abolishing the purdha system that kept women in not only physical but also mental seclusion, in inducing young people to go abroad and learn what other countries have to teach us and so widen our mind’s horizon; in encouraging

intercaste and even interracial marriages; in removing the curse of physical untouchability between the so-called high and the so-called low by establishing schools for the depressed and the outcaste; in rousing in our hearts a pride in our own culture, by herself living amongst us as one of us and working for us constantly at considerable risk to herself; and in instilling in us a love for our own religions by interpreting them to us in a rational manner, and telling us what we were beginning to forget of their beauty, their grandeur and the nobility of philosophy that they contained. In the field of Economics, like Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs. Annie Besant was also keen on the preservation of the simple arts and crafts of the humble cottages of the land.

In the words of C.Rajaji “she had materially contributed to the shaping of India, she was one of the biggest personalities. She helped young India to feel sure of the greatness of Indian culture and religion. Mrs. Annie Besant was one of those who like Gandhiji could not be put in a compartment. All things are interrelated and religion, politics, art industry, education all are interrelated branches of the same truth. She therefore took as much as part in politics as in the revival movement of Hinduism. Her

12. Ibid., p.41.
contribution to the Indian freedom is great.” Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhiji and other Indian leaders were her contemporaries\textsuperscript{13}.

In her career Mrs. Annie Besant searched for the eternal values in theoretical and applied branches of knowledge such as politics, Atheism, Fabianism, Journalism, Religion and freedom for the Indian people. The essence of Mrs. Annie Besant’s spirituality was the struggle for the rediscovery and the renewal of the Indian soul and a reinterpretation in common language of the message of the Brotherhood of humanity for the country and the world at large\textsuperscript{14}. All through her career she stood for equality of rights and duties for all men and women. In all respects and ways, she was a pioneer. Her educational ideas were characterised by the wisdom. In the field of politics, she was a constructive statesman of the highest caliber; she was equally a statesman in every other field of life. She was one of the great influencer who changed public opinion and won British support for the conception of a free and Independent India. She always used to say, “When the spirit speaks, no outside advice is wanted”. Mrs. Annie Besant’s contribution to the renaissance of India need to be recorded indelibly in the annals of this Country’s History.

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\textsuperscript{13} Man Mohan Kumar, \textit{Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857 – 1947)}, (Delhi, 1968), p.48.
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\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p.62.
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SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The thesis attempts to identify and explore the varied ideological muddles that were found in the career of Mrs. Annie Besant in a contextual arrangement. Her career was full of diverse paradigm shifts from one field to other and it is interesting to study the changes that had revolutionized various fields like Religion, Free Thought, Atheism, Theosophy, Education, Politics and Journalism. Truly speaking these are the different forms taken by Mrs. Annie Besant for the realization of the Truth in the true principles of Theosophy. The career of Mrs. Annie Besant is much interested because, she being an alien to India had made tremendous contribution to India in the realms of Theosophy, Hinduism, Women’s Education, Social upliftment of downtrodden, Journalism etc. It is amazing that a foreign lady took pride in calling herself an Indian and a Hindu and thus becoming one among the people of India. The present study is intended to bring out the contribution of Mrs. Annie Besant to Indians. Her career marks the emergence of Feminism in India in the Pre-Ghandhian period. She is also the first lady in India to have succeeded in bringing the cultural revivalism through her work towards Hinduism. Mrs. Annie Besant entry into the Theosophical Movement had given a new life to it. It was during her presidentship of Theosophical Society it developed to a greater extent. She was successful in taking the Indian Theosophist to the service of nation by making them to enter politics. It was the greatest achievement of Mrs. Annie Besant. The
flexibility in the principles of Theosophy had given an opportunity to realize truth even by means of politics.

This diamond soul had played a prominent role in the freedom struggle of India. The foundation of the Home Rule Movement was a romantic political saga of her career in the long drawn struggle for India’s independence. In the beginning not wanting to become a politician, she worked for the revival of Hinduism and took educational and social work. But later in 1914 her entry in politics was a sudden decision that took everyone by surprise. The factors responsible for her entry had been studied in detail. Moreover, how far the popularity that she had gained through her religious and social service was beneficial for Mrs. Annie Besant in entering politics is also dealt with. She entered the Indian politics at the time when the Congress was inactive, there was indeed a need of a leader to lead the people and Mrs. Annie Besant served the need by starting the Home Rule Movement.

As a Journalist she had contributed immensely. The journalistic work of Mrs. Annie Besant was well connected to her other sphere of activities including education, religion and politics and this aspects has been studied in detail. She said “I am an Indian Tomtom, waking up all the sleeping sleepers so that they may wake and work for the motherland...This is my task”. As a journalist she did a lot for the awakening of Indians in spite of many hurdles.
In the field of education the establishment of Central Hindu College is a greatest achievement. She thought that education was the only means to imbibe a nationalist spirit in the body of nation. She was also instrumental in starting and developing many Theosophical schools.

As a student of History, I was more attracted towards this beacon of light and since I want to bring to light the immense work done by Mrs. Annie Besant, I entitled my thesis as "Mrs. Annie Besant – A Study."

The Thesis deals with the different aspects of Mrs. Annie Besant. Of course, she was one among the eminent person, who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the struggle for independence. Keeping in mind the necessity and essential for the present generations to know something about this great woman, earnest and sincere efforts have been taken to highlight this woman of swift decision.

CHAPTER SCHEME:

The study is divided into five chapters converging the various activities and services of Mrs. Annie Besant.

The first chapter briefly describes the early life of Mrs. Annie Besant, the education that was imparted to her, her respectful affection towards Miss.Marryat. Miss.Marryat taught her the different languages which made Mrs. Annie Besant an expert. From the beginning itself she interested herself
in the social service. This chapter brings forth her travel with Miss. Marryat that kindled her inherent spirit. In fact, what she learned in the early days had been the base for her future actions. It also makes clear how she shifted herself from the Christian faith to Atheism and how despite her troubles in family she emerged out as a boulder. In addition to this and explanation is given about her meeting with Charles Bradlaugh and becoming a free thinker. Of course, she climbed the ladder of life by dint of her abilities and capacities and she reached the right path. From the beginning itself she was self examining and as such in her career she had experimented various movements in search of truth.

The second chapter deals with the Theosophical Movement and the entry of Mrs. Annie Besant in it. It gives a vivid picture of the transformation of Mrs. Annie Besant to the ideal of Theosophy and how she was accepted by HPB a right person for spearheading the Theosophical Movement. It is amazing to study her different paths and of how she had been diverting her attention from Religion to Atheism then to the Fabian Society and finally to Theosophy. This chapter brings out the work done by Mrs. Annie Besant for the Indian culture and national life as a president of the Theosophical Society. She preached to the world, through Theosophy that “There is No Religion Higher than Truth”. Her entry into India had given a new life to the Theosophical Movement. Moreover it would be
appropriate to say here that it was during the Presidentship of Mrs. Annie Besant that the Theosophical Society witnessed tremendous growth in its every sphere of activities. The number of Theosophical Lodges and their membership strength rose to a considerable extent after she had started her Theosophical work.

The third chapter deals with the crucial part of her career in politics and this deserves special attention. It traces how the Theosophical Society had avoided politics in the beginning of its establishment at Madras. It was Mrs. Annie Besant, who took the Indian Theosophists into the political sphere of activities. It highlights the emergence of Mrs. Annie Besant on the political stage of India to her elevation to the office of the Congress President in 1917 and the repressive measures adopted against her by the British. Her entry into the political scene of India was a significant phenomenon since it was at that time India stood in need of a leader who should give a practical lead to the nation. Since she wished to have a result oriented political activities, she launched the Home Rule Movement. She was also instrumental in setting up a network of various ideas and ideals under the leadership of devoted and enthusiastic workers who enjoined upon to push up the work of Home Rule Movement amongst the masses. Hence attempt has been made in this chapter to find out the reasons which prompted her to enter into the field of politics. It brings out the methods
adopted by Mrs. Annie Besant, which were different from that of Indian leaders and also the reaction on the part of the Government. This chapter also elicits the reason for her losing popularity in the politics. The Home Rule Movement was neither moderate nor extremist in character but however with it she gave a breakthrough to the Indian politics.

The fourth chapter deals with the journalist work of Mrs. Annie Besant. To spread the principles of Theosophy and for the revival of Hinduism the press media had been immensely used by Mrs. Annie Besant. To mobilise the people in a right sense, in the right time and in the right path about her political activities, she strained every nerve to pour the honey of Home Rule Movement in the ears of the Indian people by her gifts of writing. Her immense work to infuse among Indians, especially the youth, the fervour of patriotism is clearly explained in this chapter.

The fifth chapter elicits her pioneering work in the field of education and social reform, by which she was able to awaken many Indians to the realities of their pathetic situation. It deals elaborately about the educational ideals of Mrs. Annie Besant. Reference has been given about the role of Mrs. Annie Besant in the establishment of the Central Hindu College and the subsequent development of the Hindu University. It gives in detail the importance of religious and national education. Of course, it was Mrs. Annie Besant who trained and brought up a new generation of Indians through her
educational services. Her educational work acted as a medium in moulding the nation in its character.

SOURCES

The Theosophical Society Library and Archives, Adyar is the major source of information for both primary and secondary sources. The Primary sources for this work are Fortnightly reports, Government orders related to Judicial, Political and Public departments, the Police commission reports, Home Rule files, the Prasnottara or the Indian Section Gazette, Besant files, her original papers namely New India and Commonweal, The Madras Native Newspaper Reports etc. With regard to Secondary sources books written and published by Mrs. Annie Besant and other publication of Theosophical Society are immensely utilized. Informations are also squeezed from Souvenirs, Journals, Magazines and newspapers. The Indian Review, Modern Review, Central Hindu College Magazines, the Adyar Bulletin, Lucifer, The Theosophist and the Theosophic Thinker, provided valuable details.

Above all the personal Interviews with the present President of the Theosophical Society and other important persons related to Theosophical movement is also very useful in getting information. The personal visit of the scholar to the Head Quarters (Adyar) gave inspiration and a first hand idea about the Theosophical Society and it noble ideals.