CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANNIE BESANT'S THOUGHT.

For studying the philosophical views of any thinker it becomes necessary in the first instance to investigate into the impacts which moulded the thoughts of that thinker. Annie Besant is in no way an exception to this rule. She started to write on the intricacies of philosophy from a very young age of twenty-six years and went on enriching the field of philosophy up to her last, eighty-sixth year of life. In such a long span of life she wrote on so many different topics of philosophy - education, politics, sociology and economics - that it has become difficult for her interpreters to evaluate her philosophy from all the angles. Thus there are a score of opinions in adjudging her position as a philosopher. Some regard her as the greatest philosopher of her time whereas others give her merely the position of a historian of philosophy. These extreme views about the appreciation of her work raise a doubt in our mind whether Annie Besant was at all a philosopher. Therefore it becomes essential to study the social milieu in which Annie Besant grew up, worked and lived, before we interpret her philosophy in studying her educational ideas and schemes.

The present part of this Chapter will thus deal with the environmental factors which shaped her life and influenced
her religious, metaphysical, ethical, humanistic and educational outlook.

Here the author has tried to make a general survey of Annie Besant's thought in order to study the chief currents which influenced her philosophy. The main effort will be made to study her work in relation to the evolutionary stages of her life. Her belief in making new experiments provided a marked development of her ideas. As Annie Besant's interests were multifarious, therefore numerous new experiences were being added to her developing life every moment. Geoffery West, writing about Annie Besant's many sided contributions says: "She battled for free-thought in days when hell was an ever threatening reality, and even intelligent clergymen - leaders of religious thought - declared it the church's study, not hers, to ascertain the truth; she strove against the subjection of women, for their education and equality, in a period when the general attitude was the summed up in two sentences for a contemporary article: 'No women ought to be encouraged in the belief that she has separate interest or separate duties. God and nature have merged her existence in that of her husband'. She gave in the seventies the first popular impulse to the modern birth-control movement by her public defence of its principles in the face of every insult and ascription of obscene motive; she upheld upon platform and in print the rights of smaller nationalities at a time when the intoxication of empire
still rose unrestrained. She was a socialist before socialism became respectable, an advocate and organizer of Trade Unions when even the workers accepted them unwillingly, propagandist against royalty, capital punishment, the existing land system, and for women suffrage and equal justice. Upon all these issues she was, if never alone, a pioneer, and time has justified her.¹

Though Annie Besant's intellectual pursuits were employed in so different fields of human knowledge yet there existed no trace of mediocrity in any any of the numerous branches of her activities and thought. Every field of her activities — may it be religion, philosophy, politics or education — was enriched equally remarkably by her speeches and writings. She had not specialized in any one particular branch of knowledge but had tried to work for 'TRUTH' in all its shapes and forms. Her life of adventures and immensity of range has made her critics to think that "philosophical thought" was beyond her capacity and her judgements repeatedly fallible.² This estimate of Annie Besant's thought is unfair. It would be worthwhile to study Annie Besant, as C.Jinarajadasa suggests, "as an artist than as a lecturer of the professional type, because she does not survey any subject in the entirety, but gives

a definite presentation of it from an angle which she selects as a painter does when painting a landscape". Writing thirty years before the above quoted reference C. Jinarajadasa gives a similar remark about Annie Besant when he says about her, "For when a soul is a hero in every fibre of her being, and an artist in every one of her instincts, that soul in action cannot but be poet and prophet, patriot and leader." Thus in all the lectures and writings of Annie Besant the expression was that of an artist, but her thought was always that of a versatile thinker.

To understand her thought in its right perspective we need to have a detailed knowledge of those environmental factors and influences which though non-philosophical in their contents, had brought from Dr. Annie Besant certain philosophical responses. There is some danger that we may look at these influences in a very detached way but there is no other alternative, worthwhile, to it.

Instead of splitting up the personality of Annie Besant into water tight compartments, which will make the study unscientific and unrealistic, it will be useful to study the origin and development of her philosophical ideas under following heads and sub-heads:

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Mrs. Annie Besant's early life and works:

(1) Early Life:

Annie Besant was born on 1st October, 1847 in London in 'Wood' family, having three quarters of blood and all her heart Irish. Her birth in London was a grievance to her because she felt "playfully inclined to grudge the English
blood" which was in her father's veins, due to his English
father. Annie was prouder of her mother's family than that
of her father's, for both her mother's parents had come
to England from Ireland, whereas only her father's mother
had done so.

Annie's mother, Emily Roche Morris, was having sweet
grey Irish eyes and curling masses of raven-black hair,
whose face, writes Annie Besant, "made the beauty of home
and whose love was both sun and shield.....I have never
met a woman more self-lessly devoted to those she loved,
more passionately contemptuous of all that was mean or
base, more keenly sensitive on every question of honour,
more iron in will, more sweet in tenderness, than the mother
who made my girlhood sunny as dreamland". 2

Annie's father, William Burton Persse Wood qualified
as a doctor, writes Annie Besant "was keenly intellectual
and splendidly educated, a mathematician and a good classi-
cal scholar, thoroughly master of French, German, Italian,
Spanish and Portuguese, with a smattering of Hebrew, Gaelic,
the treasures of ancient and of modern literature were his
daily house hold delight", 3 and he liked to read aloud to
his wife while she worked, declaiming from 'Queen Mab' or
translating from foreign poets. William Wood was also a
student of philosophy and was "deeply and steadily sceptical". 4

3. Ibid, p.120.
Deep knowledge of philosophy had made Annie's father to outgrow the orthodox whims and beliefs of his time. Annie's mother, before her marriage, was a strict Roman Catholic and devoted to Christianity, who did not fully share her husband's scepticism, she held the notion "that women should be religious; while men might philosophise as they would". Her union with a liberal and unorthodox husband had modified and partially rationalised her own beliefs and in her mature years she even began to enjoy reading such theological liberals as Jowett, Colenso and Stanley. The scepticism of William Wood, writes Annie Besant, "so deeply influenced her (Annie's mother) own intellectual life that she utterly rejected the most irrational dogmas of Christianity, such as eternal punishment, the vicarious atonement of Christ, the doctrine that faith is necessary to salvation, the equality of Christ with God, the infallibility of the Bible; she made morality of life, not orthodoxy of belief, her measure of religion." In the latter years of life Annie Besant's mother shrank back intellectually from the crude dogmas of orthodox Christianity, but clung poetically to the artistic side of religion, to its art and to its music, to the grandeur of its glorious fanes, and the solemnity of its stately ritual. About the

religious attachment of the latter life of her mother, Annie Besant writes "she detested the meretricious show, the tinsel gaudiness, the bowing and genuflecting, the candles and the draperies, of Romanism and of its pinchbeck imitator Titularism".¹

Both the parents of young Annie had rebellious attitude against the dogmas that crush the reason of a man, but young Annie took religion in strenuous fashion. She writes "As a child I was mystical and imaginative, religious to the very finger-tips and with a certain faculty for seeing visions and dreaming dreams".² In her childhood, elves and fairies of all sorts were very real things and her dolls were as really children as she was herself a child. All the objects about her were to her alive, the flowers that she kissed as much as the kitten she potted and she spent most of her time in 'making-believe' and living out all sorts of lovely stories among her treasured inanimate playthings. But when Annie Besant's dreamful fancy joined hands with religion, she became rebellious against the dogmas.

Annie Besant was a voracious reader. Her mother often objected to her reading of controversial books dealt with the points of issue between Christianity and free-thought, but Annie did not stop because she believed that

¹. Ibid, p.9.
to search for truth was alone "loyalty to God and charity to the souls of men". 1

The Easter of 1866 proved a memorable date in the life of young Annie because it saw, waked and smothered her first doubt. By chance Annie resolved to write a brief history of the "Holy week" of 1866, compiled from the four gospels, but she could not write the whole of the week. Annie Besant writes, "At this point I broke down. I had been getting more and more uneasy and distressed as I went on, but when I found that the Jews would not go into the judgement hall lest they should be defiled, because they desired to eat the passover, having previously seen that Jesus had actually eaten the passover with his disciples the evening before; when after writing down that he was crucified at 9 A.M., and that there was darkness over all the land from 12 to 3 P.M., I found that three hours after he was crucified he was standing in the judgement hall, and that at the very hour at which the miraculous darkness covered, the earth; when I saw that I was writing a discord instead of a harmony, I threw down my pen and shut up my Bible". 2

As we understand that "doubt" is the main basis of all distinguished philosophical thought, so also Annie Besant

1. Annie Besant: Autobiographical Sketches, p. 32.
2. Ibid, pp.33-34.
has built her philosophy on the foundation of "doubt" arisen on the Easter of 1866. She, although, fasted as penance for her involuntary sin of mischief of that week, but the first doubt was caused and though swiftly she smothered it up, buried it and smoothed the turf over its grave. But it had been there, it had none the less raised its head and led Annie Besant to, finally, give up religion and make experiments with materialism, free-thought, Fabian Socialism and Theosophical movements of her time.

Annie Wood was the middle child between two brothers Henry and Alfred. Henry was two years older than Annie and Alfred three years younger. Annie was hardly of five years that her father died of consumption, in October 1852, and few months after her younger brother Alfred - a delicate, blue-eyed, pale-golden-haired infant passionately devoted to his father - also died. The death of beloved husband turned her, black, glossy and abundant, hair white in one night of agony and the death of loveable son brought her per-mature old age. In a very short time Annie's mother was broken and tired. Now began the time of struggle and of anxiety in the life of her destitute mother. Writing about her family's conditions after the death of her father, Annie says, "When he died, he believed that he left his wife, and children safe, at least from pecuniary distress. It was no so. I know nothing of the details, but the outcome of all was that nothing was left for the widow and children,
So the first thing the distracted widow did to retrace was to move her little flock down to Richmond Terrace, Clapham, which was so close to the protection of her mother and father as she could get. But here the family stayed poorly enough for several months and to make Henry to study in a good school it was necessary to move the whole family to Harrow and also to find some means of earning an income. Mrs. Wood, Annie’s mother, took a suitable house over the shop of a grocer and turned it into a boarding-house for some of the Harrow boys and thus gained means to support her family and prepare Henry to enter Harrow school. This arrangement lasted for ten years until Henry left Harrow and joined the Clare College, Cambridge, on a scholarship.

(2) Inner Development of Annie Besant resulting in her Copious Works.

This slender portion has been devoted to a cursory survey of the writings of Annie Besant from philosophical point of view. Annie Besant published her 330 books and pamphlets and, in collaboration with others, 25 books mainly on occult and religious subjects. A good number of her books and pamphlets are purely of philosophical purview covering educational topics, therefore an attempt has been

made here to re-emphasise certain aspects of her work so as to provide an understanding of the inner development of Annie Besant as a philosopher.

The life of Annie Besant as a philosophical writer can be divided into four major phases because Annie Besant received four notable twists in her intellectual career which influenced her thought from time to time. For a clear understanding these dramatic turnings of her life can be classified as under:

1. Annie Besant as a Free-thinker Theist,
2. Annie Besant as an Atheist and National Secularist,
3. Annie Besant as a Fabian Socialist, and
4. Annie Besant as a Theosophist.

1. Annie Besant as a Free-thinker Theist:

The very first writing of Annie Besant on a philosophical subject was "The Lives of the Black Letter Saints", which she wrote, most probably, in 1866-67. According to the Calendar of the Church of England there are two kinds of saints – red and black. The red saints are important and special services appointed for them. The black saints are only preserved in black letters on church calendars. Annie took each black-letter day, did some ecclesiastical research and wrote the life of the particular saint belonging to it. So she collected all the volumes of church history and legend and wrote the book. This book, Annie Besant submitted to MacMillans, who sent it to a person who prepared series
of church books for children. But this book was never
published.

"A Book of Hymns" edited by the Rev. Charles Voysey
in 1872 had three poems of Annie Besant. Two poems were
'Prayer' and 'For the naming of a child'. The third, bear-
ing no title, expressed her scepticism about God's direct
revelation of Himself to man. This poem concerned to 'that
spiritual liberty which man is driven to discover in the
process of evolution'. This poem reads like a chant from

1. This poem of Annie Besant was published by C. Jinarajadasa
on page 4, in 'New India', Madras, 20th October, 1917. Writing
in the 'Theosophist' XXXIX (November 1917) page 124, Annie
Besant says "Mr. Jinarajadasa has unearthed the following old
poem of mine......It must have been written in 1873" (but
1872 seems more correct). It will be interesting to record
that old poem here, which was written by Annie Besant at the
age of 25.

"Never yet has been broken
The silence eternal;
Never yet has been spoken
In accents supernal
God's thought of Himself.

We grope in our blindness,
The darkness enfolds Him:
0 fatherly kindness,
That he who beholds Him.
May see with the Soul.

Still in veil is unriven
That hides the All-holy:
Still no token is given
That satisfied wholly
The cravings of man.

But unhasting advances
The march of the ages,
The truth-seeker's glances
Unrolling the pages
Of God's revelation.
one of the Upanishads.

In 1873 Annie Besant wrote "On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth" a free-thought essay in which an enquiry was made into the nature of Jesus by an examination of the Synoptic gospels, edited and prefaced by Rev. Charles Voysey. This essay was written purposely for Thoma Scott, a publisher of heretical pamphlets, who published this and her later essays to be signed simply as 'By the wife of a Beneficed clergyman'. The importance of this essay lies not only in this fact that this reflected most of her earlier experiences and contemporary thinking, but also that it forcefully enunciated some of her fundamental thought which have featured repeatedly in her other earlier writings. This essay powerfully reflects her own free-thought to denounce Jesus as Deity.

Under the same auspices, a continuity of the previous essay was brought out, entitled: "According to St. John. On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth, Part II. A comparison between the Fourth Gospel and the Three Synoptics". This essay was also written in 1873. In this essay Annie Besant

1. (Contd. from page 77)
Impatience unheeding,
Time slowly revolving
Unresting, unspeeding,
Is ever evolving
Fresh truth about God.

Human speech has not broken
The stillness supernal,
Yet there ever is spoken,
Through silence eternal,
With growing distinctness
God's thought of Himself.
rejected as unauthentic "the theological and philosophical treatise which bears the name of John", charging it with being "fatally destructive of all true faiths towards God". Both these essays were published to establish disbelief in the supernatural claims of Christ.

In was from 1873 to 1875 that Annie Besant wrote a good number of pamphlets for Thomas Scott. Through these pamphlets, writes Arthur H. Nethercot, the biographer of Annie Besant, "a way was open to her by which she could forget her troubles (of her married life and financial problems) and at the same time help to alleviate them".¹ She turned out half a dozen of these tracts with some speed in 1874. All these essays were pointed, cogent and often highly personalized attacks on churchly dogmas, she used such titles as "On the Atonement", "On Eternal Torture", "On the Mediation", "Salvation of Ecclesiastical Christianity", and "On Inspiration". She also wrote discussions of more general topics, including "On the Religious Education of Children", "Natural Religion Vs Revealed Religion", and "The Ethics of Punishment". All these pamphlets, writes a biographer of Annie Besant, Theodore Besterman, "were straightforward and methodical but uninspired presentation of the logical case against item after item in the christian dogma. She was always careful to explain, however that she

¹. Nethercot, Arthur H; First Five Lines of Annie Besant. p.68.
was not attacking the notion of Deity, and that she was merely arguing against certain Christian doctrines, and eventually against Christianity itself.¹

In 1875 Annie Besant wrote "Euthanasia" in which she argued for the painless killing of persons suffering from hopeless and painless diseases. Similarly she wrote "On Prayer" and "On the Nature and Existence of God". During this year Annie Besant was feeling an atmosphere of conflict in her mind. In her "Autobiographical Sketches" Annie Besant writes, "I had nothing left of the old faith save belief in "a God", and that began slowly to melt away. The Theistic axiom: "If there be a God at all he must be at least as good as his highest creature", began with an "if" and to that "if" I turned my attention..... I questioned, are we sure that there is a Creator? Granted that, if there is, he must be above his highest creature, but - is there such a being? ""What if God were only man's own image reflected in the mirror of man's mind? What if man were the Creator, not the revelation of his God"?²

The pamphlets of 1875 clearly expressed the attacks of Annie Besant on the limitation of human intelligence and its incapacity for understanding the nature of God, presented as infinite and absolute. Annie Besant had entirely given up the use of prayer, not because she was an Atheist, but because she was still a Theist. Prayer seemed to her, to be absurd, if she believed in a God who was wiser and better than herself. An all-wise God did not need the suggestions; an all-good God would do all that was best without her prompting. Annie Besant regarded the use of prayer as a blasphemous absurdity and for a considerable

1. C. Jinarajadasa's article - 'Mrs. Besant's Poems' - published in New India, of 20th October, 1917, p. 4. This poem provides a brilliant description of Annie Besant's outlook on prayer. The poem reads as under:

who pants and struggles to be free,
who strives for others' liberty,
who, failing, still works patiently,

He truly prays.

who, loving all, dare none despise,
But with the worst can sympathise,
who for a truth a martyr dies

He truly prays.

who, when a truth to him is known,
Embraces it through sable or frown,
who dares to hold it though alone,

He truly prays.

In musing, strength must come to dare,
Petitions are but empty air,
Brave action is the only prayer,

Thus learn to pray.
time she had discontinued her prayers. Annie Besant believed that "God fades gradually out of the daily life of those who never pray; a God who is not a Providence is a superfluity; when from the heaven does not smile a listening Father, it soon becomes an empty space whence resounds no echo of man's cry."

Upto this stage, before meeting Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant called herself a Theist, who tried to the loftier conception of the Divine through her own straightforward and methodical way other than offered by the orthodoxy.

(ii) Annie Besant as an Atheist and National Secularist:

It was on the 2nd August, 1874 that Annie Besant met Charles Bradlaugh for the first time and later her union with him made her an active Atheist and a devoted national secularist. Charles Bradlaugh had a depth in his knowledge and language, that Annie Besant was so much impressed by his first lecture that she writes: "I had never before heard eloquence, sarcasm, fire and passion brought to bear on the Christian superstition, nor had I ever before felt the away of the Orator, nor the power that dwells in spoken words."

A few days after their meeting, Bradlaugh offered

2. Ibid, p.90.
Annie Besant a place on the staff of his paper "National Reformer". The first contribution of Annie Besant to the paper appeared in the number for August 30th, 1874, over a nom de guerre of "Ajax". This name was suggested to her by the famous statue of 'Ajax crying for light'. The cry through the darkness for light, even if light brought destruction, was one factor that awoke the keenest sympathy of response from her heart:

"If our fate be death, give light, and let us die."

Under the influence of Charles Bradlough she delivered her first lecture entitled "The Political Status of Women" at the co-operative Society's Hall, 55, Caste Street on August 25, 1874. The second lecture entitled: "The True Basis of Morality" was delivered on September 27th, 1874.

In January 1875 Annie Besant made up her mind to lecture regularly. On January 17 she spoke on the topic "Civil and Religious Liberty". In the 'National Reformer' of February 14 appeared for the first time a long list of Annie Besant's lecturing engagements. On February 17 she read her paper "The Existence of God" in the Dialectical Society. On February 28 she spoke on the topic "The Gospel of Christianity Vs the Gospel of Free-thought".

In 1875 the situation in London, as a result of lectures of Annie Besant, became so inflamed that not only the secularist papers but also the orthodox papers were filled with it. People were wrangling and disputing over Mrs. Annie Besant, who was totally unknown a few months before.

In 1876 were published Annie Besant's few pamphlets, by Thomas Scott, which Annie Besant had written before her joining Bradlaugh's paper. These pamphlets were "The Beauties of the Prayer-Book" Part I, II and III.

In 1876 Annie Besant wrote a tract entitled "constructive rationalism" and a book entitled "The History of the Great French Revolution" (a story of the revolution from the People's point of view). The book on French revolution was in six lectures which involved a large amount of strenuous labour of the author. In writing this history Annie Besant was compelled to read a large amount of the then current literature of that time and also the great standard histories of Louis Blanc, Michelet and others. Annie Besant writes: Fortunately for me, Mr. Bradlaugh had a splendid collection of works on the subject, and before he left England he brought to me two cabs full of books, French and English, from all points of view, aristocratic, ecclesiastical, democratic, and I studied these diligently and impartially until the French Revolution became to me as a drama in which I had myself taken part, and the actors
the rein became personal friends and foes”. ¹


The article on "Giordana Bruno" was written on 23rd July 1877 in National Reformer, but years later had an entirely unanticipated influence on her past. Annie Besant traced the career of Bruno as a student; Dominican monk and sceptic of Christian and Aristotelian dogmas; he revised Plato and Pythagoras; had disputes in France and England; was persecuted for heresy in Germany, Prague and Italy and was finally burnt as an atheist in 1600 A.D., after being imprisoned for eight years. While writing in 1876 on the philosophy of martyrdom Annie Besant might had cherished that very life of Bruno for herself, but only after thirty years she discovered that Bruno and she herself were one and the same – that in her previous reincarnation she had been Bruno.

The essay "Is the Bible Indictable"? was an enquiry whether the Bible comes within the ruling of the Lord Chief

¹. Annie Besant: Autobiographical Sketches, p.108.
Justice as to be obscene literature. This essay has the ironical list of passages from the Bible, which according to the ruling of the Chief Justice of England against a book on birth control entitled "The Fruits of Philosophy" by Knowlton (published jointly by Annie Besant and Bradlaugh) must be considered obscene.

The essay "Law of Population: Its consequences and its bearing on Human conduct and Morals" was published as a defence of birth control, which Annie Besant wrote as a consequence of the prosecution of herself and of Bradlaugh for circulating Knowlton's 'Fruits of Philosophy', and for which her daughter Mabel was removed from her custody by the Law of England. Fifty thousand copies of the pamphlet "Law of Population" were sold up to 1881 and it was translated into German, Italian, French, Swedish, Dutch and in some of the Indian languages. About her pamphlet "The Law of Population" Annie Besant writes: This little book included a statement of the law, evidence of the serious suffering among the poor caused by over-large families, and a clear statement of the checks proposed, with arguments in their favour.¹

The book 'My Path of Atheism' was a collection of the pamphlets written between 1873 and 1877 by Annie Besant for Thomas Scott, to whom this book is dedicated.

¹. Ibid, p.152.
All the pamphlets of 1877 written by Annie Besant were published by the Free-thought Publishing House of which Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh were the sole proprietors. Her publications of 1877 were brief essays comprising of thirteen to sixteen pages each. Annie Besant's interest in philosophy is here seen to have found more definite directions. She criticises the metaphysical arguments and denounces God on atheistic grounds. She makes a reasoned attempt to justify Atheism as a positive creed. She sets out from a species of monism that matter and spirit are only manifestations of one eternal and undervived substance that argues that the Deity must necessarily be that eternal and undervived substance.

In 1878 Annie Besant wrote "Christian Progress", "English Republicanism", and "The Fruits of Christianity". All these pamphlets dealt with the coarse elements in some Christian hymnals.

In 1879 Annie Besant wrote two small essays: "Marriage: As it was, as it is and as it should be" and "England, India and Afghanistan or why the Tory Government Gags the Indian Press: A plea for the weak against the strong".

The article on 'marriage' was serialised in 'National Reformer', though Annie Besant wrote this article impersonally and never mentioned her own experiences of marriage or situation, it was clear to any reader that she was analysing
the problem with herself in mind. About her article on marriage, Arthur Nethercot writes: "In her pamphlet she briskly reviewed the history of marriage laws from Hebrew and Roman times to the present, when woman was still regarded as a chattel; advocated the passage of a short act ordaining that marriage should in no fashion alter the civil status of a woman as an individual; urged equal rights for men and women in seeking divorce, on grounds of adultery, cruelty, or drunkenness; and took a positive stand against such anomalies as 'judicial separation'. "

"England, India and Afghanistan" was her first pamphlet dealing with Indian affairs. Like all her pamphlets it also dealt primarily with facts and told in detail, with names and dates, the story of England's past treatment of India and Afghanistan. In this pamphlet Annie Besant protests against England's conduct in India, she writes: "We exploited Hindustan, not for her benefit, but for the benefit of our younger sons, our restless adventures, our quarrelsome and ne'er-do-well surplus population. At least, for the sake of common honesty, let us drop our hypocritical mask, and acknowledge that we seized India from lust of conquest, from greed of gain, from the lowest and paltriest of desires."}

In 1880 Annie Besant wrote "The Ethics of Punishment", and "Landlords, Tenant Farmers and Labourers". In the essay "The Ethics of Punishment" Annie Besant devoted much attention to the problems of crime and punishment.

Towards the end of 1879 Charles Bradlaugh called a conference, which Annie Besant also attended, to consider the question of the reform of the land laws. As a result Annie Besant was able to study various allied social problems and thus wrote her popular pamphlet in 1880 entitled "Landlords, Tenants Farmers and Labourers".

In 1885 Annie Besant wrote her philosophical works entitled "Auguste Comte: His Philosophy, His Religion and his Sociology", "Is Christianity a success?", "Sin and Crime: Their Nature and Treatment", "Women's Position According to the Bible", and "A World without God". From these titles we get a clear idea of Annie Besant's solid grounding in handling the topics of Christianity and the Bible.

Between 1879 and 1885 Annie Besant had done a great deal of constructive work and had published practically nothing of a purely destructive literature of anti-religious kind. Now suddenly, she produced a long series of attacks of quite unexpected bitterness.

In her essay "A World without God", Annie Besant writes that "Those of us who find joy in right doing, who work because work is useful to our fellows, who live well because
in such living we pay our contribution to the world's wealth, leaving earth richer than we found it - we need no partly payment after death for our life's labour, for in that labour is its own exceeding great reward".\footnote{Annie Besant: An Autobiography, p.258. The reference of the essay 'A world without God' given in the Autobiography.} She further writes "To me the thought that the world was in the hands of a God who permitted all the present wrongs and pains to exist would be intolerable, maddening in its hopelessness. There is every hope of righting earth's wrongs and of curing earth's pains if the reason and skill of man which have already done so much are free to do the rest; but if they are to strive against omnipotence, hopeless indeed is the future of the world......Atheism will utilise, not destroy, the beautiful edifices which once wasted on God, shall hereafter be consecrated for man".\footnote{Ibid, pp.266-267,270.}

Apart from the other works of 1885 Annie Besant gave to the world, in that year, her most important work entitled "Autobiographical Sketches". This book gives a detailed record of her mind from her birth upto 1885. This work was published when Annie Besant was still a colleague of Charles Bradlaugh and had not selected the Fabian Society for her passage through Socialism.

Annie Besant joined Fabian Society in 1885 but her old pamphlets were still published in 1886 and 1887 by the
In 1886 three important philosophical works of Annie Besant were published: "Life, Death and Immortality", The Sins of the Church" and "The World and its Gods". These pamphlets show clearly Annie Besant tried to explain the problems of life and mind from the biological point of view. In her essay "Life, Death and Immortality", Annie Besant writes, "Scientifically, life is not an entity but a property; it is not made of existence, but a characteristic of certain modes. Life is the result of an arrangement of matter, when re-arrangement occurs the former result can no longer be present; we call the result of the changed arrangement death. Life and death are two convenient words of expressing the general outcome of two arrangements of matter, one of which is always found to precede the other". ¹

In 1887 Annie Besant wrote a small essay entitled, "Why I do not believe in God". In this essay Annie Besant reduced to a physical impossibility, the existence of the Being, described by the Orthodox as a God possessing the attributes of personality. Having thus discussed the notion of a personal God, Annie Besant inquires whether any idea of God can be attained. While summing up this essay, Annie Besant writes: "I do not believe in God. My mind finds no grounds on which to build up a reasonable faith. ¹

¹. Ibid, pp.244-245.
My heart revolts against the spectre of an Almighty indifference to the pain of sentient beings. My conscience rebels against the injustice, the cruelty, the inequality, which surround me on every side. But I believe in Man. In man's redeeming power; in man's remoulding energy, in man's approaching triumph, through knowledge, love and work.¹

(iii) Annie Besant as Fabian Socialist:

The upsurge of New Socialism in England had attracted the attention of Annie Besant. At the beginning 1884 she wrote in 'The National Reformer': "What tests 1884 may have for our courage, what strains on our endurance, what trails of our loyalty, none can tell. But this we know—that every test of courage successfully met, every strain of endurance steadily borne, every trail of loyalty nobly surmounted, leaves courage braver, endurance stronger, loyalty truer, than ever was before. And therefore, for our own and for the world's sake, I will not wish you, friends, on 1884 in which there shall be no toil and no battling; but I will wish you, each and all, the hero's heart and the Hero's patience, in the struggle for the world's raising, that will endure through the coming year".²

The above written words applied prophetically to Annie Besant's own experiences in 1884 when she could not

¹. Ibid, pp.243-244.
continue in her old ways but was inclined towards Socialism. In April 1884, a debate took place between Bradlaugh and Henry M. Hyndman, and here for the first time Annie Besant failed to see eye to eye with Bradlaugh. She met George Bernard Shaw, Henry M. Hyndman, Hubert, Graham Wallas, the Webbs, the Blands and other Fabians.

Annie Besant published a series of articles in 1885 making plain her adhesion to Socialism and her reasons for doing so. In the Pamphlet "The Redistribution of Political Power (1885) she traced the results of the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884 and also suggested some lines for future progress. The following passage shows the direction of Annie Besant's mind at that time when she wrote this pamphlet. She writes: "There can be no doubt in the minds of reasonable people that a ten hours' day is too long......The new Parliament should pass an Eight Hours Bill, making the legal day a day of eight hours only, and giving one half-holiday in the week, so that the weekly hours of labour shall not exceed forty-four. In time to come I trust that the hours of labour will be yet further shortened, but the passage of an Eight Hours Bill would mark a good step forward. Looking at the question from a rational point of view, it is surely clear that a human being should not be required to give more than eight hours out of the twenty-four - one-third of his time - for absolute bread-winning. Another seven or eight hours must be given to sleep, leaving eight for
meals, exercise, recreation and study. The last eight are short enough for their varied uses, and I look forward to a time when the first section shall be shortened and the third lengthened; but if every worker had even eight hours of freedom in the day, his life would be a far more human and far more beautiful thing than it is at the present time.¹

In a pamphlet entitled "Why I am a Socialist" (1886) Annie Besant arranges her reasons under three heads: "I am a Socialist because I am a believer in Evolution", "I am a Socialist because of the failure of our present civilization", and must continue to be, an integral part of the present method of wealth - production and wealth - distribution".² The first of these arguments is fully developed in 'The Evolution of Society' (1886) in which there is shown to be progressively evolutionary scheme in the development of society to industrialism and from industrialism to socialism. 'Modern Socialism' (1886) analyses the capitalistic system more closely and offers specific remedies. The evils "can be radically cured only in one way: it is by the substitution of co-operation for competition, of organisation for anarchy in industry".³

In 1884, from every side the socialist controversy grew and Annie Besant heard, read and thought much but said

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¹ Annie Besant: The Redistribution of Political Power, pp.24-25
² Annie Besant: Why I am a Socialist, pp.2,4,6.
³ Annie Besant: Modern Socialism, p.27.
practically very little about it. In the same year a
highly intellectual socialist, John Hobertson was included
in the staff of 'The National Reformer' and thus Annie Besant
came into close touch with the actual philosophy and practical
side of socialism. To her the case for socialism was intellec-
tually complete and ethically beautiful. Now the trend of
Annie Besant's thought was turned towards the social prob-
lems such as mid day meals of Board School Children, eight
hours work for the factory workers in place of ten hours
work, building of hospitals for the poor, work houses for
the worn-out creatures etc.

In 1885 the feeling surged so strongly in her heart
that Annie Besant sealed her adhesion to socialism by join-
ing the Fabian Society on August, 1885, for which she was
for several years one of the leading members.

Annie Besant spoke on her favourite subjects. In
1885 her lecture was 'The Right of Speech', she also wrote
on the topic "The Redistribution of Political Power" in
1885. She delivered her speeches on "why I am a Socialist",
and the Evolution of Society in 1886. In the same year she
wrote her pamphlet entitled "Modern Socialism". In 1887
she delivered her speeches on "Social and Political Action",
"Radicalism and Socialism" and "The Socialist Movement".
In 1888 her lectures were on "Industry under Socialism",
"Why we work for Socialism" and "The Trade Union Movement".
In 1887 a number of early writings were collected in books entitled "Social and Political Essays" and "Essays on Socialism". Annie Besant also took part in public debates with G.W. Foote on "Is Socialism Sound" in 1887, and with Frederick Miller on "Socialism v. Individualism" in 1889.

The purpose of her lectures was not the study and development of the Socialist thought but its popularization. It is fairly safe to say that she made no permanent contribution to the socialist thought as her stay in the Socialist movement was for a very short time, yet that working class opinion today is so largely and so increasingly socialistic must be attributed in part to the untiring lecture work of Annie Besant in the later eighties. She tried to lessen the breach between socialism and Radicalism. As a socialist she stressed the ideal of the fully developed man, and attacked Industrialism because it destroyed individualism. She toiled to solve practical social issues of her time.

(iv) Annie Besant as a Theosophist:

Upto 1887 Annie Besant was writing on a definite line of denouncing God and retaining a faith in man. But after this year she found full transformation. She did not write anything but kept silent. The cause of this portentous silence can be traced in her autobiography where Annie Besant writes: "Lately there has been dawning on the minds of men far apart in questions of theology, the idea of founding a new Brotherhood, in which service of Man should take the place erstwhile given to service of God..."
a brotherhood in which work should be worship and love should be baptism, in which none should be regarded as alien who was willing to work for human good. One day as I was walking towards Millbank Gaol with the Rev. S. D. Headlam, on the way to liberate a prisoner, I said to him: Mr. Headlam, we ought to have a new church, which should include all who have the common ground of faith in and love for man. And a little later I found that my friend Mr. W. T. Stead, editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, had long been brooding over a similar thought, and wondering whether man 'might not be persuaded to be as earnest about making this world happy as they are over saving their souls'.

Annie Besant further writes, "The teaching of social duty, the upholding of social righteousness, the building up of a true commonwealth - such would be among the aims of the church of the future. Is the hope too fair for realization? Is the winning of such beautiful vision yet once more the dream of the enthusiast? But surely the one fact that persons so deeply suffering in theological creeds as those who have been toiling for the last three months to aid and relieve the oppressed, can work in absolute harmony side by side for the one end -- surely this proves that there is a bond which is stronger than our antagonism, a unity which

is deeper than the speculative theories which divide.¹

The quotation given above is from the editorial of
the paper written by Annie Besant for February 1888 issue
clearly which she found some sort of solution of her
difficulties.

Theosophy, as Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the
Theosophical Society and Colonel Olcott, its first presi-
dent understood it, did not posit any God, like that of
the Christians or the Mohammedans and therefore had no
open conflict with the atheistic views of Annie Besant.
The difference between the atheism and theism consists
fundamentally in their respective conception of the
Ultimate Reality, which the former considers impersonal
and unconscious and the latter believes to be personal
and self-conscious. The Theosophy to which Blavatsky
and Olcott belonged, held their affinity with the former
position, i.e., of atheism. Being inclined to Buddhism
they did not believe in the Personality of God but they
believed in the unseen, in Soul, in the endless possibili-
ties of Soul and in the right culture in which Soul can
sever this chain of Karma and attain Nirvana. Thus
Theosophy, without demanding of Annie Besant a surrender
of her atheism and secularism, offered her an easy way
out of the difficulties that occurred in her intellectual

¹. Ibid, p.430.
and moral life. Her walk through Atheism into Theosophy was only a transfiguration of her old viewpoints concerning secularism and atheism and not a true conversion into beliefs totally different from what she previously had.¹

In 1889 Annie Besant severed all her relations with her old co-workers and became a Theosophist. She delivered a lecture in 1889 on the subject "why I became a Theosophist" in order to make her old colleagues understand her transformation. She concluded her lecture in the following words "It has cost me pain enough and to spare to admit that the Materialism from which I hoped all has failed me, and by such admission to bring on myself the disapproval of some of my nearest friends. But here, as at other times in my life, I dare not purchase peace with a lie. An imperious necessity forces me to speak the truth, as I see it... That one loyalty to Truth I must keep stainless, whatever friendships fail me or human ties be broken. She may lead me into the wilderness, yet I must follow her; she may strip me of all love, yet I must pursue her; though she slay me, yet will I trust in her; and I ask me other epitaph on my tomb but

"She Tried To Follow Truth."²

Her lectures and pamphlets from 1889 onward mark her great interest in the Theosophical Philosophy. There was no other Theosophical thinker who has contributed so copiously in the field of Theosophy as did Annie Besant. In 1889 her unhesitating plunge into Theosophy made her to give more and more time to intensive study under Madame Blavatsky. In May 1891, Blavatsky suddenly died leaving Annie Besant, writes Geoffrey West, "as her successor in a general capacity, and in particular as chief Secretary in the Inner Group of the Esoteric Section and Recorder of the teachings and as Outer Head also of the Esoteric Section".¹ The death of Mme Blavatsky, the honoured friend and chief of Annie Besant, threw so many duties on her that, believing that in Theosophy lay the main hope of a better religious, moral and social order, Annie Besant firmly resolved to leave her affiliation to all the old associates in social work to attend to the higher mission of Theosophical work. In April, 1891 she announced her withdrawal from the different parties and associations.

Writing about Annie Besant's withdrawal, her biographer Arthur H. Nethercot says "This whole change in Annie Besant's orientation had been occasioned by H.P. Blavatsky's removal from the scene. In January she had written a front page article for the STAR, defending

herself from the charge that in becoming a Theosophist she had ceased to be an active humanitarian and maintaining that Theosophy as taught by Mme Blavatsky imposes on its disciples a life of the external altruism.¹

Colonel Osott, though the President of the Theosophical Society, held, after the death of Blavatsky, merely the hollow title of the President. Annie Besant was the only English Theosophist with a really wide general reputation. Her strong personality, her superhuman energy and her incessant labours were of great benefit to her. She could be sure, always, of press publicity, of large audience of her lectures. Under her influence Theosophical work spreaded and everywhere gathered force.

The years 1891 and 1892 are perhaps the greatest landmarks in the philosophical development of Annie Besant because in these years were published a flood of her pamphlets and lectures which were only dealing with the Philosophy of Theosophy. The chief works were "In Defence of Theosophy", "The Sphinx of Theosophy", "Theosophy and Its Evidences", "Theosophy and the Law of Population", "A Rough Outline of Theosophy", "Theosophy", "Theosophy and Christianity", Theosophy and its Practical Application", "Why You Should be Theosophist", "What Theosophy Is?", "Place of Peace" and "The Seven Principles of Man". In all these pamphlets

Annie Besant explained the objectives, principles and message of Theosophy to the world.

In 1893 Annie Besant wrote her "Autobiography". This book is an improvement on her "Autobiographical Sketches" which was published in 1885 by the Free Thought Publishing House. Her 'Autobiography' is a detailed study of her life from the very birth to her forty-six years of mature personality. The captions of the chapters of this work reveal her psychological and philosophical bent of mind. The first chapter of this book, dealing with her birth, bears the title "Out of the Everywhere into the Here" which is a line from the mystic poet George MacDonald's popular poem "Baby". The last chapter of her autobiography depicts the historic scene of her walk through atheism into Theosophy and holds the caption "Through Storm to Peace". Her autobiography is a very important document for understanding her life and development. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar writes about her "Autobiography" in these words: It is a gospel of undaunted courage and unflinching integrity and like the confessions of St. Augustine and other great biographies in literature, that book narrates the struggle of a great soul, from darkness to light, according to its vision of light and darkness.

From 1893 to 1907, before becoming the President of the

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1. Aiyar, Sir C.P. Ramaswami: "Dr. Besant as a Comrade and a Leader." p.3.
Theosophical Society. Annie Besant toured India, America, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark and the continent and delivered lectures, wrote pamphlets, tracts and books, edited journals and newspapers concerning Theosophy and explaining its more wide boundaries to the world than were provided by Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott and other earlier writers of this new religion. She brought out a flood of reading material which was widely circulated all over the globe. The chief titles of her works of that period are noted as follows:

1894: "An Introduction to Theosophy", "The Building of Kosmos and other Lectures" "The Meaning and the Use of Pain".


1896: "Man and his Bodies".

1897: "The Ancient Wisdom": "An Outline of Theosophical Teachings", "Four Great Religions", and "The Three Paths to Union with God".


1899: "Dharma" and "Evolution of Life and Form".

1900: "Avatars".
1901: "Death and After" and "Thought Power: Its control culture".

1902: "Theosophy and Imperialism".


1906: "Hints on the Study of the Bhagavad Gita" and "The Perfect Man".

These publications deal with the philosophical aspects of Annie Besant's thought and are of enduring significance because they explain her theory of spiritual evolution and her views on consciousness, reincarnation, karma, self, thought-power, pain, evil, life, death, birth, soul, god, dharma, avatars etc. Since the above-mentioned books and their import have been extensively quoted in subsequent chapters any detailed discussion of them is out of place here.

In 1907 after the death of Colonel Olcott, the first founder-President of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant
became, in fact and as well as in spirit, the President of the Society.

After becoming the President of the Theosophical Society the flood of publications from her pen abated and her lecturing and touring activities widened. Therefore from 1907 to 1933, her last year of life, most of the works are from her lectures which she delivered for Theosophical Lodges in different parts of the World, addresses of the Annual Conventions of the Theosophical Society and speeches made in the Queen's Hall London and other places all over the world.

From 1907 onwards Annie Besant published:

1907: "London Lectures of 1907", "The Wisdom of the Upanishads".
1908: "Australian Lectures".
1909: "The Changing World and Lectures to Theosophical Students".
1910: "Popular Lectures on Theosophy" and "Reincarnation".
1911: "The Immediate Future and Other Lectures", "The Middles of Life and How Theosophy Answers it", "The Value of Devotion", and "The Ideals of Theosophy".
1913: "Evolution and Occultism", "An Introduction to Yoga", "Investigation into the Super Physical", and "The Spirit Who is Man and the Spiritual Life".


1917: "Duties of the Theosophists", and "The Mysteries".

1918: "Nature's Finer Forces", and "The Search For Happiness".


1922: "Theosophical Christianity", and "Real and the Unreal".

1923: "Theosophy, the Interpreter" and "Brahmavidya".

1924: "Theosophy as the Basic Unity of National Life", "Progress of the Theosophical Society", "The Real and the Unreal in Nation's Life", and "Civilization's Deadlocks and the Keys".


1926: "Talks on the Path of Occultism" and "How a World Teacher Comes".

1927: "Some American Lectures" and "The New Civilization".

1928: "Theosophy, Past and Present".

1929: "The Future of Theosophical Society".

1930: "Indian Ideals".

We now come to a brief review of the Philosophical Works of Annie Besant after her election as the President of the Theosophical Society. All her publications, after 1907, are her lectures. These reflect her philosophy and indicate the general trends of her thought as they took shape from time to time. In her later works the influence of Hindu philosophy is very predominant because she weaves her philosophical thought on Hindu Viewpoints and freely...
quotes the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata
and the other Hindu epics in her lectures and writings and
the develop her metaphysical and ethical concepts on them.

In most of her works we find a great duplicacy of
ideas. This defect of repetitions is generally found in
her lectures because she was not a cold armchair intellec-
tual like Karl Marx or a contemplative philosopher like
Hegel absorbed in visions of abstract truth, but she was
a strong willed practical thinker like Gandhi, prove to
quick, unhesitating decision and having a definite message
for the world - Annie Besant was in reality a devoted
true Karmayogin. Because Annie Besant had to make tours
of the whole of the world, to deliver her practical thoughts
and influence always a new audience by her lectures, there-
fore some repetition had to occur in her printed lectures.

On the whole, it is enough to remark that her works, may
they be earlier or later, concern with the most obstruse
problems of life which she treated in a lucid and interest-
ing manner and provided a food for thought to every philo-
sophical mind.

Annie Besant has written much on Education. So far
as the import of this dissertation is to understand
Annie Besant's educational thought, so it will not be out
of place to mention here the titles of books, written by
Annie Besant, covering the educational topics. The books are:-
1874: "On the Religious Education of Children".
1885: "Autobiographical Sketches", and "The Redistribution
of Political Powers".

1886: "The Evolution of Society".
1893: "Annie Besant: An Autobiography".
1895: "The Means of India's Regeneration" and "The Use of Evils".
1898: "Individuality", and "Emotion, Intellect & Spirituality".
1900: "Some Problems of Life".
1901: "Ancient Ideals in Modern Life".
1903: "Education as a National Duty".
1908: "The Necessity For Religious Education", and "Education as the Basis of National Life".
1909: "On the Education of the Depressed Classes".
1910: "Transactions of the Education Conference of 1910".
1911: "Psychology", "The Universal Text-Book of Religion and Morals", "Meaning and Methods of Spiritual Life", and "Essays and Addresses".
1913: "The Protection of Children", "Wake up India: A Plea for Social Reform", "Wake up India", and "India".
1914: "The Crisis in National Education" and "India and the Empire".

1916: "Boaring of Religious Ideals on Social reconstruction", "Preparation for Citizenship", "Social Service" and "Theosophy and Life's Deeper Problems".


1918: "The Principles of Education", "National Education" and "The Place of Religion".

1919: "Education For the New Era", and "Problems of Reconstruction".

1921: "Presidential Address in First Reform Conference", "Great Plan", and "Theosophy and the World Problems".

1922: "Theosophy and World Problems".

1923: "The School Boy as Citizen" and "Social Reform".

1924: "Higher Education in India - Past and Present", and "Civilization's Deadlocks and the Keys".

1925: "Indian Ideals in Education, Religion and Philosophy, and Art (Kamla Lectures)", and "World Problems of Today".

1926: "India: Bond or Free".

Magazines edited by Annie Besant for children and school-college going students:


(B)

Environmental Factors which Shaped Annie Besant's Philosophy

Every thinker is a product of his environmental conditions in which he lives and works. Annie Besant cannot be an exception to this truth. Her own education, her association with some intellectual luminaries of her time, her thorough study of books and authors, her personal sufferings and her success of the early experiments -- all these factors had gone a long way in shaping her individuality and philosophical personality. Here in this brief portion of this chapter our main aim is to discuss cursorily, with the help of her own views, the different facets of her dramatic life so as to understand her philosophic personality in a clear form.

(1) Formal Education: Annie's formal education had been quite sketchy as she was neither admitted into any academic institution up to her eighth year of life and nor her mother was very particular in sending her to any school. Annie's mother had made some definite plans of the education of Annie's elder brother Henry, elder to Annie by two years only,
and for his good future and proper schooling she had severed her all relations with the "wood" family, left the ancestral house and gone to Harrow to provide best education possible by her. When Miss Marryat, a lady famous for her genius for teaching, herself requested Annie's mother to allow Annie to be educated with her niece but Annie's mother demurred. After a good deal of persuasion Annie's mother yielded. Writing on this incident Annie Besant says: "It was urged upon her (Annie's mother) that the advantages of education offered were such as no money could purchase for me; that it would be a disadvantage for me to grow up in a house full of boys - and in truth, I was as good a cricketer and climber as the best of them - that my mother would soon be obliged to send me to school, unless she accepted an offer which gave me every advantage of school without its advantages. At last she yielded, and it was decided that Miss Marryat, on returning home, should take me with her".  

C.M. Williams, Annie Besant's biographer, describes the non-educational attitude of Annie's mother towards her daughter's academic future in not accepting the offer of Miss Marryat, brought a psychological conflict in Annie which caused, "a growing jealousy of her brother, this casual male who took her mother's every sacrifice for granted".

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But there is no recorded evidence showing any discord between Annie Besant and her mother for her rejecting the offer of Miss Marryat.

The true fact, in not agreeing to the offer of Miss Marryat, is that in the England of the early nineteenth century the women education was not popular in orthodox Roman Catholic families so, Annie's mother, who herself had not received any academic education, was not particular about her daughter's academic progress.

Annie's teacher, Miss Ellen Marryat was the youngest sister of the famous novelist Captain Frederick Marryat, who was an author of many popular stories for children. Miss Marryat, who herself was lame, looked around for the service of the world through teaching. In 1855 Miss Marryat saw pretty Annie in a house of Annie's new neighbour and decided to take Annie as a companion of her niece in studies. So after her mother's approval Annie went to live for seven years with "Auntie" as Miss Marryat wanted the children to call her. Miss Marryat took greatest delight in teaching and from time to time she added new children to her party, sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl. She chose those proteges who "must be gently born and gently trained", and of those Annie was one. It was the habit of Miss Marryat to find out and help those only "on whom poverty presses most heavily, when the need for education for the children...

weighs on the proud and the poor".\footnote{1}

Young Annie was very fortunate as to come under the care of Miss Marryat, who had a system of education which at that time was highly unorthodox. Miss Marryat's system of education not only moulded young Annie's character, but also had later a great influence when the one time pupil came to formulate her own educational theories and certain regulations into the conduct of the policy of central Hindu College Benaras and other institutions in India.

Miss Marryat taught everything except music, for which she had engaged a music master. She taught composition, recitation, reading aloud English, French and German and devoted herself in training the children in the most sound fashion. Miss Marryat's training left a great impact on Annie Besant.

The methods of teaching of Miss Marryat were very progressive as she believed in the principle of learning by doing and not by memorization. She taught with love and gave least pain to the children and made her lessons most enjoyable. She did not believe in teaching spelling or grammar directly, but made the children write letter to each other describing the things they had seen in their walks or retell a story already read. Miss Marryat read aloud the compositions of the children and corrected the faults of spelling, grammar

\footnote{1. Loc.Cit.}
and of style.' She also read aloud the clumsy sentences which seemed unmusical in sound and made the children observe their errors.

Annie Besant describes how Miss Marryat brought out the faculty of observation in her charges. "'0, dear I have nothing to say' would come from a small child, hanging over a slate. 'Did you not go out for a walk yesterday?' Auntie would question. 'Yes', would be sighed out but there's nothing to say about it'. 'Nothing to say. And you walked in the lanes for an hour and saw nothing, little No-eyes? You must use your eyes better today'.

Some further details of Miss Marryat's educational ideas deserve a full quotation while explaining her excellent way of teaching spelling. Annie Besant writes, "We used to write our lists of all the words we could think of which sounded the same but were differently spelt. Thus: "key, quay", "knight, night" and so on, and great was the glory of the child who found the largest number. Our French lessons - as the German later - included reading from the very first. On the day on which we began German reading Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell" and the verbs given to us to copy out were those that had occurred in the reading. We learned much by heart, but always things that in themselves were worthy to be learned. We were never given the dry questions and answers which lazy teachers so much affect".  

2. Loc.Cit.
Miss Marryat gave education for fulness. She taught boys as well as girls the use of the needle. She taught Geography by painting skeleton maps, putting together puzzle maps in which countries in the map of a continent, or countries in the map of a country were always cut out in their proper shape. The only grammar that Annie learnt was the grammar of Latin, and the ruler of the grammar were learnt only through composition. Miss Marryat believed that grammar should not be taught but taught. The Latin grammar was mainly used as the basis because Latin was considered more perfect and solid as the foundation for modern languages. Explaining how Miss Marryat fostered the healthy habit of clear thought and expression, Annie Besant writes: "Auntie had a great horror of children learning by rote things they did not understand, and then fancying they knew them.

"What do you mean by that expression, Annie? she would ask me.

After feeble attempts to explain, I would answer: Indeed, Auntie, I know in my head, but I can't explain".

Then, indeed, Annie, you do not know in your head, or you could explain, so that I might know in my own head".

In Miss Marryat's school no books were taught or read, on the Sunday, except the Bible. The students of Marryat school were to teach in the Sunday School started by Miss Marryat.

She believed that it was useless for students to learn if they did not try to help those who had no one to teach them.

Annie Besant writing about Sunday Schools of Miss Marryat says: "The Sunday-school lessons had to be carefully prepared on the Saturday, for we were always taught that work given to the poor should be work that cost something to the giver. This principle regarded by her as an illustration of the text, "shall I give the Lord my God that which has cast me nothing?" ran through all her precept and her practice. When in some public distress we children went to her crying, and asking whether we could not help the little children who were starving, her prompt reply was, "what will you give up for them?" And then she said if we liked to give up the use of sugar, we might thus each save six pence a week to give away. I doubt if a healthier lesson can be given to children than that of personal self-denial for the good of others.¹

In Miss Marryat's home the children experienced a plenty of freedom. After studying the lessons the children used to have amusement in the form of long walks, rides, picnics in the lovely country round Charmouth and Miss Marryat always joined them. She wanted to see children making progress not only mentally but also physically.

From the age of eight the education of Annie Besant

accented the religious side of her character. Under Miss Marryat's training her religious feeling received a strong Evangelical bent, but she could not be 'converted' to the religion of her tutor. Miss Marryat had started a Sunday School and a Bible class for the children too old for the school. The children learnt by heart many hymns and passages from the Bible, and Annie excelled in those lessons, she writes "I had an uneasy sense that I was often praised for my piety when emulation and vanity were more to the front than religion; as when I learned by heart the Epistle of James, for more to distinguish myself for my memory than from any love for the text itself."\(^1\)

In the spring of 1861 Miss Marryat made an important innovation in her educational routine that she announced her intention of going abroad. Miss Marryat taught German for some months as she thought it wise to know the language of the country fairly well before visiting that country. French had already been learnt and practice was made during dinner. But when the party actually reached Bonn the students of Miss Marryat could not understand a word of the luggage-porters.

Annie Beassert's experiences in Bonn were not satisfactory. About Miss Marryat, she writes: Dear Auntie was a

\(^1\) Ibid, pp.141-142.
maiden lady, looking on all young men as wolves to be kept far from her growing lambs?¹ Bonn University was just then experiencing a sort of Anglophilia and the charges of Miss Marryat gave the University students an excellent opportunity to pursue it. Annie and the other girls were followed around by mischievous German youths wherever they went. After bearing the torture for three months and fearing for their morals Miss Marryat sent both the girls back to England for the holidays, somewhat in disgrace. But Annie would never forget that tour as she writes "lovely excursions during those months; such clambering up mountains, such rows on the swift-flowing Rhine, such wanderings in exquisite valleys. . . . . . . the Rhine at the foot of Drachenfels, or the soft, mist-veiled island."²

After two months stay in England Annie rejoined Miss Marryat in Paris, where they spent seven "happy, useful months". On Wednesdays and Saturdays they were free from lessons. They spent much of their time in galleries of the Louvre, and became familiar with the masterpieces of art. During their weekly wanderings they visited almost every church in Paris. Annie's favourite church was St. Germain de l'Auxerrois. They found delight in mingling with the bright crowd on the champs Elysees and the Bois.

¹. Ibid, p.145.
². Ibid. p.146.
On their return from the Continent Miss Marryat took the girls to Sidmouth in Devonshire for the summer of 1862. She was a wise woman and she had realized that the girls were passing their middle teens, so Miss Marryat began giving them freedom. The girls were trained more and more to work alone so as to become independent for the proper adjustment in the world. Miss Marryat withdrew her constant supervision and teaching so that the girls may not be bewildered by their unaccustomed freedom but little by little they may be trained to work alone.

During the winter of 1862-63 Miss Marryat stayed in London and Annie remained with her, attending the admirable classes of M. Roche. In the spring Annie returned home as Miss Marryat had told her, writes Annie Besant "that she thought all she could usefully do was done, and that it was time that I should try my wings alone". ¹ Annie came back to Harrow, at the age of sixteen and a half, to live with her mother.

Miss Marryat's teaching put a remarkable influence on Annie Besant, she writes, "No words of mine can tell how much I owe her, not only of knowledge, but of that love of knowledge which has remained with me ever since as a constant spur of study."²

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1. Ibid, p.150.
But the story of Annie Besant's formal education is not complete here. The love of knowledge with which she was introduced by Miss Maryat did not subside after her return from her. She studied books regularly throughout her difficult times of married life and afterwards when she worked with Charles Bradlaugh for his paper and political life in England.

Mrs. Annie Besant's husband, Rev. Frank Besant, filed a petition in Chancery on 9 April 1879 charging his wife of propagating the principles of Atheism by her addresses, lectures, writings and books which would be detrimental to his daughter, Mabel's morals and happiness if to be left in her mother's charge. On 29 April, 1879 the case was decided against Annie Besant and Mabel was legally snatched away from her on some defined terms of Annie Besant's future relationships with her own children. This case totally upset Annie and in order to get mental poise she wanted to keep herself engaged more in some tuff work. She started her studies for matriculating from the London University with a view to relieve her from her mental tensions gained from her domestic troubles. She explains herself "here let me say to any one in mental trouble, that they might find an immense relief on taking up some intellectual recreation of this kind; during this paring; in addition to my ordinary work of writing, lecturing and editing - and the lecturing
meant travelling from one end of England to the other - I translated a fair-sized French Volume, and had the wear-and tear of pleading my case for the custody of my daughter in the court of Appeal.......I found it the very greatest relief to turn to algebra, geometry, and physics, and forget the harassing legal struggles in wrestling with formulae and problems.¹

Annie Besant's wish to pass the Matriculation examination of the London University clearly shows that she was not satisfied with her academic qualifications. Though her private schooling under Miss Marryat had set her on the right lines, she had been essentially self-educated. Never had she attended any formal class in an academic institution. But when the custody case was decided against her, she made an important decision which was to start her off on a fresh career.

Early in January 1878 the Convocation of London University had passed a new supplemental charter to admit women to its degrees. This new educational opportunity for women, coupled with Annie's own recent researches in law and medicine, offered an irresistible challenge to Annie Besant. In the February 1789 issue of the Magazine Charles Bradlaugh inserted a prominent note: "Mrs. Besant, thinking it may add to her usefulness to the cause, intends to try to take advantage of the opportunity afforded for women obtaining

¹. Ibid, p.345.
degrees in the London University. The necessary studies in preparation for the very severe examination will occupy so much of her time that for many months to come she will be able to lecture only on Saturday and Sunday.¹

In 1879 Annie Besant met Edward B. Aveling, A.D.Sc. of London University who was a marvellously able teacher of scientific subjects. He was very clear and accurate in his knowledge, enthusiastic in his love of science and took great pleasure in imparting his knowledge to others.

Annie Besant became a pupil of Dr. Aveling who encouraged her to matriculate in June 1879. She passed her Teachers' examination at the South Kensington branch of the University. Her biographer, Arthur H. Nethercot, writes: "Her studies were not only of remarkable diversity but of a most unfeminine nature. In the examination of 1880, for example, she was rated "First class" in Organic Chemistry, mathematics, theoretical mechanics, magnetism and electricity, botany, general biology, animal physiology, and acoustics, science, she took top honours in botany, advanced physiology, mathematics, and advanced chemistry."²

Her attainments in the examinations were so impressive that she was asked to teach the course of elementary animal physiology in the autumn of 1880. Annie Besant's triumphant career continued into 1881. But its imperfection

¹ Nethercot, Arthur H: First Five Lives of Annie Besant, p. 156
² Ibid., p. 186.
was now married slightly by two "second divisions". In South Kensington examinations Annie Besant made "first divisions" in advanced botany and advanced animal physiology but "only seconds" in advanced mathematics and advanced chemistry. In preparing for the matriculation and the other examinations Dr. Aveling was the sole tutor of Annie Besant.

Annie Besant, was very proud of her being the only candidate in the whole of England who had been given honours in her Botany examination and the great scientist Thomas Huxley who had been one of her examiners, applied through Dr. Aveling for permission to use the Royal Botanical Garden in Regent's Park for her further studies in Botany. The Curator of the Botanical Garden rejected the application in horror on the ground that he could not expose his daughters, to Annie Besant, who often used the garden. After all fifty thousand copies of the most controversial book of Annie Besant "Law of Population" were sold to the public of England.

A little later the Birkbeck Institute, where Annie Besant had attended a class in electricity, omitted her name from the list of successful candidates at the South Kensington examinations. Taking the omission of her name accidental, Annie Besant inquired about the error and was told that the members of the Committee have purposely omitted her name because they were collecting money for a building fund, feared that some of the contributors may not withdraw
if they found that she had been allowed to attend one of its classes. Even in May 1883 Annie Besant’s application for admission to the practical Botany class at University College, was rejected. Her biographer writes: "The winner of the only honours award in botany in England was refused", when she had sent a letter of application, the secretary and the Lady Superintendent of the University College informed her insuitingly that she could not be admitted because there was some prejudice against her. Even the council of the college itself endorsed the rejection.

Annie Besant, fighting madely for her rejection, circulated a petition, prepared by Aveling, asking the Council to summon on extra-ordinary meeting to reconsider its action, and got several important professors and doctors, including Thomas Huxley, to sign it. The University College Senate took action in support of the position of the Council.

The meeting of the Council, which was held late in July 1883, listened attentively and politely to Mrs. Besant’s resolution proving that their recent action was contradictory to the fundamental principles of the college. In that Council only nine members noted for her. Her supported friend and teacher Thomas Huxley, recently elected president of Royal Society, was not one of these. Huxley did not vote at all.

Annie Besant, commenting over the decision of the Council, wrote in her paper: "They have probably made it

1. Ibid.,191.
impossible for me to take degree this year, but they have not the power to shut me together". Annie Besant was hopeful to graduate from London University which was a more liberal University.

But it was practical chemistry in which Annie Besant failed thrice. She passed her First B.Sc. and Preliminary Science Examinations at London University very easily. Her failure in practical Chemistry puzzled her since she had passed a far more difficult practical chemical examination for teachers at South Kensington. In explaining the cause of her failure, Jinarajadasa writes "There was one examiner in the University who told her beforehand that however brilliantly she might do the papers which were set, he would not pass her, because he had a strong antipathy towards her atheism and to certain of her activities for the masses, which he considered immoral" so she could not take her degree and her ambition of passing the examination of Bachelor of Medicine after B.Sc. remained unfulfilled.

Only an experienced psychologist can properly reveal that how it became possible by Annie Besant, who was rejected by the Orthodox Academic World of England in 1883, to found a college of her own in India, after only one and a half decade, where she framed her own rules, applied her own

2. Jinarajadasa, C; 'The Diamond Soul of Annie Besant' an article in the Annie Besant Centenary Book, pp.4-5.
principles, promulgated her own regulations in the conduct of its policy, and fulfilled her unfulfilled desire of getting a higher degree, more higher than that which she could ever get in England.

(2) The Influence of Some Persons

It is not an easy task to determine the extent of the influence of some persons on the genesis of Annie Besant's philosophy. It might form an interesting topic of a separate investigation. It would be enough to say that Annie Besant's associations were so wide-ranged, her affiliations so numerous, the age in which her thought matured so vibrant with currents and cross-currents of ideas of eminent men and women of divergent opinions and Annie Besant's own nature so restless and always striving for new outlets for expression, that an adequate estimate of all those luminaries, who shed their beacon lights for illuminating the developing thought of Annie Besant, would hardly be an easier matter. Bernard Shaw was correct when he wrote about Annie Besant that "Mrs. Besant is a woman of swift decisions. She sampled many movements and societies before she finally found herself; and her transitions were not gradual; she always came into a movement with a bound, and was preaching the new faith before the astonished spectators had the least suspicion that the old one was shaken". 1

1. Shaw, Bernard: Annie Besant's Passage Through Fabian Socialism, an article in the pamphlet "Dr. Annie Besant: Fifty Years in Public Work". p.3.
All that we can do here is to write in brief some descriptions of the persons, in the light of Annie Besant's biography, who influenced her in the passage of her development.

(i) Parents of Annie Besant: The available evidence suggests that Annie Besant belonged to a mediocre family and possessed affectionate and devoted parents during the early years of her life, but only after a peaceful life of five years, her father died and thus the tragedy of her life started.

Annie Besant's mother was a woman of firm resolutions and by dint of her hard labour and courage she did not make it possible for the young children to feel the void of the absence of the father. Writing about the high character of her mother, Annie Besant says: "My darling mother certainly 'spoiled' me, so far as were concerned all the small roughness of life. She never allowed a trouble of any kind to touch me, and cared only that all worries should fall on her, all joys on me. I know now that I never dreamed then, that her life was one of serious anxiety". 1

(ii) Miss Ellen Marryat: Hardly Annie was of eight years that Miss Marryat took her to Fern Hill, near Charmouth, in Dorsetshire, where she remained for more than seven years under Miss Marryat's able guidance. Annie Besant's early

education received an Evangelical bent, through Miss Marryat's influence, as she learnt by heart many parts of the Old and the New Testament. Young Annie took her religion in strenuous fashion like any young child who has an impressionable age and strict Evangelical influence. Young Annie was a strict orthodox Christian but Annie Besant of mature age laughed at the Christian dogmas like a non-believer and a staunch atheist. Therefore it can be hardly said that there existed any clear influence of her childhood belief on her mature philosophical mind. On the contrary most of her philosophical and social ideas originated during her mature years of life as a result of her thorough study and experiments to grapple with the problems of life.

The principles and methodology of education which Annie Besant learnt at the feet of Miss Marryat had put considerable influence over Annie Besant's whole life and made possible for her to take up educational work in the Hall of Science of Dr. Aveling and later on in the Central Hindu College in India. Annie Besant, admiring the methodology of teaching of Miss Marryat says: "Her method of teaching may be of interest to some, who desire to train children with the least pain, and the most enjoyment to the little ones themselves." Miss Marryat visited the poor, sent food from her own table to the sick and the needy was characteristic

1. Ibid., p. 134.
of her. The lessons of humanism learnt from Miss Marryat had gone a long way with Annie Besant when she took up educational, social and political work with great fervour in England and India.

(iii) William Prowting Roberts: In the initial stages of her life, before leaving the harbourage of girlhood to set sail on the troublous sea of her life, Annie was influenced by Mr. Roberts "the poor man's lawyer", who was always ready to fight a poor man's case without fee and to champion any worker unfairly dealt with. He worked hard in the agitation which saved women from working in the mines. Mr. Roberts used to narrate to Annie "how he had seen them (women) toiling, naked to the waist with short petticoats, barely reaching to their knees, rough; foul-tongued, brutalized out of all womanly decency and grace; and how he had seen little children working there too, babies of three and four set to watch a door, and falling asleep at their work to be roused by curse and kick to the unfair toil", while narrating such like pathetic sights the old man's eyes would begin to flash, his voice to rise and then his face would soften with a relief as the slavery was put to an end. This old lawyer was Annie's 'first tutor in Radicalism'. Young Annie regarded

the poor as folk to be educated, looked after, charitably
dealt with and always to be treated with most perfect cour-
tesy. "But to Mr. Roberts", writes Annie Besant, "the poor
were the working-bees, the wealth producers, with a right to
self-rule, not to looking after, with a right to justice, not
to charity". 1 Mr. Roberts praised John Bright very much for
his work and speeches which he made for the emancipation of
the poor and the slaves.

With a close association of Mr. Roberts and his family
young Annie learnt the cause of the poor people which put a
deep impression on her and made her to be regardful to the
poor and the oppressed in her whole life.

(iv) W - D - the serious illness of the children
of Annie Besant in 1872 caused a feeling of angry resentment
against God in her mind. Her husband, thinking himself in-
capable in helping her, brought a clergyman to whom Annie
Besant identified only as "Mr. W - D - " as she thought it
best to suppress his full name for fear she would injure
him. Annie Besant writes about this clergyman "whose wider
and more liberal views of Christianity exercised much influ-
ence over me during the months of struggle". 2

First day, when this clergyman met Annie Besant, he
spoke very little but sent a kind letter reconciling

1. Ibid. p. 38.
2. Ibid. p. 50.
Annie Besant to her sufferings. His arguments concerning the mystery of pain and God’s duties were totally orthodox but his letter gave Annie Besant a moral support. Mr. W - D wrote a large number of letters to Annie Besant in which he discussed all the sceptical questions and allied problems. This correspondence encouraged Annie Besant’s confidence but the letters of Mr. W - D - could not persuade Annie Besant out of her problems and finally mental dissatisfaction broke her health and thus ended the correspondence between Annie Besant and Mr. W - D - .

(v) Rev. Charles Voysey: Annie Besant was influenced by Rev. Charles Voysey when she was being tossed on storms of spiritual doubt and finally felt the need to free herself from the crude forms of Christian thought, rigidly held then by orthodox Christians as a part of Christ’s teaching.

Rev. Charles Voysey, a clergyman of the church of England who, encouraged by Charles Bradlaugh to fight the established Church of England, had been expelled by his church for advance opinions on Christianity, held preachings at the Theistic Church. When Annie Besant listened for the first time to the sermons preached by Rev. Voysey in St. George Hall she felt with satisfaction "that there were people who had passed through my own difficulties, and had given up the dogmas that I found so revolting".¹ Annie Besant went

again on the following Sunday and was moved by a strong desire to speak to Mr. Voysey who had struggled out the Christian difficulties. Next Sunday Annie Besant was again at that Hall, she met Mrs. and Mr. Voysey and writes about them, "I found that their Theism was free from the defects that have revolted me in Christianity, and they opened up to me new views of religion. I read Theodore Parker's "Discourse on Religion", Francis Newman's works, those of Miss Frances Power Cobbe, and of others; the anguish of the tension relaxed; the nightmare of an Almighty Evil passed away; my belief in God, not yet touched, was cleared from all the dark spots that had sullied it, and I no longer doubted whether the dogmas that had shocked my conscience were true or false. I shook them off, once for all, with all their pain and horror and darkness, and felt, with joy and relief inexpressible, that they were delusions of the ignorance of men, not the revelations of a God". ¹

Voysey's preachings gave Annie Besant much relief but she was not able to find any satisfactory answer to her revolts concerning the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. Voysey's preachings emphasized the humanity of Christ at the expense of His Deity but when the eternal punishment

¹. Ibid. p.204.
and the substitutionary atonement had gone there seemed no reason to Annie Besant to account for so tremendous a miracle as the incarnation of the Deity. In the course of her study of religions Annie Besant had become familiar with the ideas of Avataras in Indian creeds and she saw that the incarnate God was put forward as a fact by all ancient religions and thus her knowledge of the Indian philosophy and religions paved a way for challenging the especially Christian teaching, when the doctrines morally repulsive were cleared away by Voysey's preachings. But Annie Besant shrank from the thought of disbelieving a doctrine so dear to her from all the associations of her past, she writes: "There was so much that was soothing and ennobling in the idea of a union between Man and God, between a perfect man and a Divine life, between a human heart and an Almighty strength. Jesus as God was interwoven with all art and all beauty in religion; to break with the Deity of Jesus was to break with music, with painting, with literature; with Divine Babe in His Mother's arms; the Divine Man in His Passion and His Triumph; the Friend of Man encircled with the majesty of the Godhead. Did inexorable Truth demand that this ideal Figure, with all its pathos, its beauty its human love, should pass away into the Pantheon of the dead Gods of the Past?"

1. Ibid. p. 205.
Annie Besant struggled to know the truth. She tried to give up her belief in Christ as God, but with it she had also to give up Christianity as a creed. When once she challenged the unique position of the Christ, the name Christian seemed to her to be a hypocrisy, and its renunciation a duty binding on the upright mind like that of her. She tried to solve this riddle in her meetings with Voysey but with no result. Annie Besant herself tried, as she writes, "to carefully review the evidence for and against the Deity of Christ, with the result that that belief followed the others, and I stood, no longer Christian, face to face with a dim future." ¹

Annie Besant's acquaintance with Voysey grew into friendship which made Voysey to edit and write prefaces of Annie Besant's two free-thought pamphlets entitled "On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth" and "According to St. John". Voysey also edited a poetry book entitled "A Book of Byrns" which had three poems by Annie Besant.

(vi) **Thomas Scott**: When Annie Besant was introduced to Thomas Scott in the autumn of 1872 by Charles Voysey, she had reached to a definite point of disbelief in Christianity. Scott had put a very great influence in the free-thought ideology of Annie Besant in the earlier

¹. Ibid. p. 206.
stages of her doubt in Christian religion.

Scott was a well born, widely travelled and wealthy man, who determined to use his wealth for the propagation of intelligent and sincere religious doubt. He issued, for many years, monthly a series of pamphlets, all heretical, though very varying in their shades of thought. All these pamphlets were well written, cultured and polished in tone. Writing about Thomas Scott, Annie Besant says "At his house met people of the most varied opinions; it was a veritable heretical salon. Colenso of Natal, Edward Maitland, E. Vansittart Neale, Charles Bray, Sarah Hennell, and hundreds more, clerics and laymen, scholars and thinkers, all coming to this one house, to which the entree was gained only by love of Truth and desire to spread Freedom among men". ¹ Annie Besant wrote, for Thomas Scott, her first free-thought essay only a few months after her meeting him through Voysey.

Annie Besant wrote a series of pamphlets for Scott. These tracts had such titles as "On the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth (1873), According to St. John (1873), Natural Religion Versus Revealed Religion (1874), On the Eternal Torture (1874), On Inspiration (1874), On the Atonement (1874), On the Religious Education of Children (1874),

¹ Ibid, pp.210-211.
Euthanasia (1875), On Prayer (1875), On the Mediation and Salvation of Ecclesiastical Christianity (1875), On the Nature and the Existence of God (1875), The Beauties of the Prayer Book Part I, II & III (1876) and Constructive Rationalism (1876). When Annie Besant had written these pamphlets she called herself a Theist and a Free-thinker.

Annie Besant had formed a very close intimacy with both the Scotts, husband and wife and they also helped Annie Besant at the time of adversity, when Annie Besant was left alone by the legal separation of her husband and the death of her mother. Thomas Scott gave Annie Besant a great help in the form of money, food, comfort and moral support. On the death of Thomas Scott, on the last day of 1878, Annie Besant wrote: "It was Thomas Scott, whose house was open to me when my need was sorest, and he never knew, this generous, noble heart, how sometimes when I went in, weary and overdone, from a long day's study in the British Museum, with scarce food to struggle through the day - he never knew how his genial, 'well, little lady' in welcoming tone, cheered the then utter loneliness of my life. To no living man - save one - do I owe the debt of gratitude that I owe to Thomas Scott". ¹

(vii) Charles Bradlaugh: Writing in the memory of Thomas Scott Annie Besant had written "To no living man -

save one" she referred to that 'one', who was Charles Bradlaugh, who had very greatly influenced and impressed Annie Besant's future life and works. It was on August 2, 1874 that Annie Besant entered the Free-thought Hall, saw Charles Bradlaugh and heard for the first time his lecture "on the resemblances between the Krishna and the Christ myths". He invited Annie Besant to talk over the subject of Atheism if she would make an appointment. He also offered Annie Besant a book which he had been using in his lecture.

From that first meeting of 2 August, 1874 dated a friendship which broke till the death of Charles Bradlaugh. Explaining Bradlaugh's influence over her, Annie Besant says: "Let me here place on record, as I have done before, some word of what I owe him for his true friendship; though, indeed how great is my debt to him I can never tell. Some of his wise phrases have ever remained in my memory "you should never say you have an opinion on a subject until you have tried to study the strongest things said against the view to which you are inclined". "You must not think you know a subject until you are acquainted with all that the best minds have said about it". "No steady work can be done in public unless the worker study at home for more than he talks outside". "Be your own harshest judge, listen to your own speech and criticize it;
read, abuse of yourself and see what grains of truth are in it". .........Through our long comradeship he was my sternest as well as gentlest critic.......He saved me from the superficiality that my "fatal facility" of speech might so easily have induced; and when I began to taste the intoxication of easily won applause, his criticism of weak points, his challenge of weak arguments, his trained judgments, were of priceless service to me, and what of value there is in my work is very largely due to his influence, which at once stimulated and restrained".¹

Charles Bradlaugh was extremely courteous especially to women. He would stand with uplifted hat as he asked a question of a maid-servant or handed a woman into a carriage. This courtesy in him was because he was a widely travelled person and he was absolutely indifferent to all questions of social position: peer or artisan, it was to him exactly the same.

The first conversation between Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh took place in August 1874. Annie Besant had brought along her the manuscript of her book "On the Nature and Existence of God" to serve as the basis of their conversation. Bradlaugh read the manuscript very attentively and told Annie Besant very frankly that there was very little difference in their views. He informed

¹. Ibid. pp.234-35.
her, "you have thought yourself into Atheism without knowing it". All that Annie Besant changed in her essay under discussion was her 'vulgar error' to the effect that the atheist says "there is no God". This she corrected to the truer philosophic position that the atheist says he can find no acceptable evidence that there is a God.

At the end of their first discussion Annie Besant invited Charles Bradlaugh to come down to see her at Garwood. Bradlaugh curtly warned her that she would pay heavily for any friendship extended to him because he was very much hated by English society. Later Annie Besant wrote him a letter repeating her invitation and telling him that she had counted the cost, he accepted the invitation and came to see her. This friendship brought problems and troubles to Annie Besant, she writes "but the strength and happiness of it outweighed a thousand times the loss it brought, and never has a shadow of regret touched me that I clasped hands with him in 1874, and won the noblest friend that woman ever had".

It did not take Bradlaugh long to know the worth of Annie Besant. Only a few days after their first meeting he offered Annie Besant a job on the staff of his paper 'National Reformer' at one guinea a week. In return

1. Ibid. pp. 236-37.
2. Ibid. p. 274.
she was to write reviews, articles and a regular section, of personal comments which Annie Besant, entitled "Day Break". For this paper Annie Besant adopted her nom de guerre "Ajax". On 30 August, three weeks after her entry into the National Secular Society of Bradlaugh that "Ajax" published her first column.

In the first week "Ajax" generally made remarks on such topics as secular education, cremation, international news and table - tapping. In the ensuing weeks she continued to demonstrate her mastery of the contemporary scene. No province of knowledge was beyond the tip of her pen. She wrote reviews of books ranging from economics and practical politics to Milton. By the end of September "Ajax" was fully launched on her new career as a National Reformer.

In January 1875 after much thought and self-analysis Annie Besant made her mind to give herself wholly to propagandist work as a Free thinker and a social reformist and to use her tongue as well as pen in the struggle. She started helping Bradlaugh in his election campaign, lectured in the Hall of Science, published and jointly sold with Charles Bradlaugh the controversial book on birth control and fought the case in the court. The polemics of the book on birth control deprived legally Annie Besant of the one child of which she had been given the custody.
All the difficulties and troubles of Annie Besant were equally shared by Charles Bradlaugh who remained a guiding force to her activities and thoughts. Bradlaugh was, writes Bernard Shaw "quite simply a hero; a single champion of Anti-Christendom against the seventy-seven champions of Christendom. He was not a leader; he was a wonder whom men followed and obeyed. He was a terrific opponent, making his way by an overwhelming personal force which reduced his most formidable rivals to pigmies". To Annie Besant the influence of Bradlaugh was of greatest help; it was primarily practical. Bradlaugh always sat before Annie Besant an example of what patience, strength and certainty may accomplish. Writing in March 1891, in 'The Review of Reviews' after the death of Bradlaugh, about his influence on the others, Annie Besant says "His vivid and intense personality, his imperious will, his imposing physique, acted strongly on every one who came in touch with him; all he touched became either his friends or his foes. None who knew him remained indifferent to him; he aroused bitterer hatreds against himself than did any other man of his time, and he awoke more passionate enthusiasm and devoted love". The close relationship and joint participation in free thought and political work had made the intimates of Annie

Besant and Charles Bradlaugh to think some improperity in the relation between them. Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, daughter of Charles Bradlaugh, who should have known if any one did, writes: "They were mutually attracted; and a friendship sprang up between them of so close a nature that had both been free it would undoubtedly have ended in marriage. In their common labours, in the risks and responsibilities jointly undertaken, their friendship grew and strengthened and the insult and calumny heaped upon them only served to cement the bond".¹

Sri Prakasa, son of Dr. Bhagwan Dass who was a colleague of Annie Besant in her theosophical and educational work, a disciple of Annie Besant from his childhood and the former governor of Bombay and Madras comments "Personally I think Mrs. Besant was the one person who was capable of the deepest affections without any thought of sex; and she was a woman of such remarkable courage that when she was working with colleagues she did not care what the world thought of her personal attachment to those colleagues and her absolute abandon to the cause for which they were working together".²

(viii) George Bernard Shaw: Annie Besant met Bernard Shaw in 1885, who was according to her "one of the

most provoking of men; a man with a perfect genius for 'aggravating' the enthusiastically earnest, and with a passion for representing himself a scoundrel'. Those, days Shaw described himself jestingly 'a loafer', the word Annie Besant detested. She liked Shaw because he was a very poor writer with certain definite set principles with him; preferring starving his body than to starving his conscience. Shaw worked hard day and night for the good of the people and Annie Besant also liked to join the Fabian Society so as to work for the cause of Socialism.

By 21 January 1885, Annie Besant had made up her mind to join the Fabian Society, though the world did not know her intentions. Shaw had gone to the Dialectical Society to deliver an address advocating socialism, and had found the members upset by the appearance of Annie Besant who had long ceased to attend meetings and who was still considered the most redoubtful champion of the free-thought movement. Shaw writes "I was warned on all hands that she had come down to destroy me, and that from the moment she rose to speak my cause was lost. I resigned myself to my fate, and placed my case as best I could. When the discussion began everyone waited for Mrs. Besant to lead the opposition. She did not rise; and at last the

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opposition was undertaken by another member. When he had finished, Mrs. Besant, to the amazement of the meeting, got up and utterly demolished him. There was nothing left for me to do but gape and triumph under her shield. At the end she asked me to nominate her for election to the Fabian Society. This was the first time that Shaw had actually made the acquaintance of Annie Besant.

In selecting the Fabian Society for her passage through Socialism Annie Besant had made a sane choice because her association of Shaw and other Fabians had made her understand some important social problems and also helped her to write pamphlets and deliver her successful lectures on the different facets of Socialism.

It was inherent in Annie Besant's nature that she would remain attached to any Society upto that time only when she would find some strenuous work for her in its establishment, and when that society would have been fully organized Annie Besant found a distaste to remain in it by joining a new Society or faith "preaching the new faith, before the astonished spectators had the least suspicion that the old one was shaken". When Annie Besant had joined the Fabian Society she had tried hard to become, writes Shaw, "a sort of expeditionary force, always to

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2. Ibid. p.17.
the front when there was trouble and danger carrying away audience for us when the dissensions in the movement brought our policy into conflict with that of the other societies, founding branches for us throughout the country, dashing into the great strikes and free-speech agitations of that time (the eighteen-eighties) forming on her own initiative such ad hoc organizations as were necessary to make them effective, and generally leaving the routine to us and taking the fighting on herself. Her powers of continuous work were prodigious. An attempt to keep pace with her on the part of a mere man generally wrecked the man; those who were unselfish enough to hold out to the end usually collapsed and added the burden of nursing them to her already superhuman labours.¹

When the Fabian Society was firmly established Annie Besant's interest in the Society died and her restless character began to pant for finding a new outlet, she swept ahead with her accustomed suddenness and impetuosity and joined a new faith known as Theosophy.

Writing about Annie Besant's march from Socialism towards Theosophy, Shaw writes: "One day I was speaking to Mr. H.W. Massingham, then editor of the 'Star', at the office of that paper in Stonecutter Street. I glanced at

¹. Ibid. pp.21-22.
the proofs which were lying scattered about the table. One of them was headed "why I became a Theosophist"? I immediately looked down to the foot of the slip for the signature, and saw that it was Annie Besant. Staggered by this unprepared blow, which meant to me the loss of a powerful colleague and of a friendship which had become part of my daily life, I rushed round to her office in Fleet Street and...... I played all the tricks by which I could usually puzzle her, or move her to a wounded indignation......But this time I met my match. She listened to me with complete kindness and genuine amusement......she had after many explorations found her path and come to see the universe and herself in their real perspective".¹

(ix) William T. Stead: Annie Besant met Stead², the editor of the 'Pall Mall Gazette' and 'Review of Reviews', during the mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square on account of the worst economic depression in Britain in the middle eighties. The situation in the country had become tense, the labour conditions were very deplorable and unemployment stared grimly from every side. Mills and factories were shutting up. The jobless slouched listlessly through the streets, thronged to mass meetings in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square to hear hot speeches by the revolutionaries.

². Stead, W.T.: was best known as the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette published in the afternoons in London. The paper, which had had John Morley for editor, under Stead as editor was widely read in all parts of Britain.(contd...)
From the beginning of 1886 these meetings began to multiply in number and attendance. All through 1886 and 1887 the grievances of the people accumulated against the government, which proved unable to do anything to ameliorate the conditions of the people. When the agitators took over, the police made arrests but the demonstrations increased day by day resulting in more of arrests.

At that critical time Annie Besant in co-operation with her new friend Stead formed a new organization "Law and Liberty League" on 18 November 1886 with the Liberal M.P., Jacob Bright as its Chairman and Annie Besant, John William, William Morris, William T. Stead, Rev. Steward D. Headlam, John Burns, Henry M. Hyndman, G.W. Foote and Dr. Richard Pankhurst as members. Though all the members of the 'Law and Liberty League' were of diverse interests but the league was organized without any trouble and it quickly started operations. Bradlaugh, Aveling and Shaw wrote in praise of Annie Besant in the papers for her remarkable work in the new league.

For a long time, as a result of Annie Besant's turbulent experiences in social reform, and the general unrest of the time she had been wondering whether a new (Continued from page 147).

2. because it stood not merely for Liberalism in politics, but was also the champion of all schemes for the liberalisation of the thoughts and minds of the British people. Stead introduced for the first time the interwoven in the history of journalism.
humanistic religion based on a "common ground of faith in and love for man," would not be possible. In the "Our corner" for February 1888 Annie Besant wrote "I found that my friend Mr. W.T. Stead, editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, had long been brooding over a similar thought and wondering whether man 'might not be persuaded to be as earnest about making this world happy as they are over saving their souls'. The teaching of social duty, the upholding of social righteousness, the building up of a true commonwealth - such would be among the aims of the church of the future.......If there be a faith that can remove the mountains of ignorance and evil, it is surely that faith in the ultimate triumph of Right, in the final enthronement of Justice, which alone makes life worth the living, and which gema the blackest cloud of depression with the rainbow-coloured arch of an immortal hope."2

The above quotation from Annie Besant's Autobiography clearly reveals how she was unconsciously marching towards the Theosophy as she wanted to seek that path which may lead her to the service of man. As a step towards bringing about a union of those ready to work for 'Man' Annie Besant and Stead resolved to start a new magazine, the 'Link' a half penny weekly, the spirit of which was described in its motto,

taken from Victor Hugo: "The People are silence. I will be the advocate of the silence. I will speak for the dumb. I will speak of the small to the great and of the feable to the strong......I will speak for all the despairing silent ones. I will interpret this stammering; I will interpret the grumblings, the murmurs, the tumults of crowds, the complaints ill-pronounced, and all these cries of beasts that, through ignorance and through suffering, man is forced to utter......I will be the World of the People. I will be the bleeding mouth whence the gag is snatched out. I will say everything." The main object of the magazine the 'Link' was to be the building up of a 'New Church' dedicated to the service of man.

In 1889 William T. Stead gave to Annie Besant the book "The Secret Doctrine" in two fat volumes written by H.P. Blavatsky, saying "Can you review these? My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite made enough on these subjects to make something of them". Annie Besant carried the books home, read them with rapt attention and keen interest. During the course of her fiercely determined study of the book, Annie Besant wrote one of her 'Annie' notes to Stead: "I am immersed in Madame Blavatsky. If I perish in the attempt to review her,

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1. Ibid. p.432.
2. Ibid. p.440.
you must write on my tomb, 'she has gone to investigate the Secret Doctrine at first hand'". Annie Besant sent the review to Stead.

Stead was already introduced to H.P. Blavatsky through Mme Olga Novikoff, a Russian lady at whose salon Stead had found the noted dignatories of England such as Gladstone, Froude, Mathew Arnold, Carlyle and other notables. Stead first met Mme Novikoff in 1887 and next year she had written him asking whether he would like to meet Mme Blavatsky. Stead was interested in the Occult science of Blavatsky so he went and was delighted with and at the same time somewhat repelled by this strange, unconventional, masculine woman who gave him her photograph and told him that he was a good Theosophist.

When Annie Besant asked Stead for an introduction to the writer of the 'Secret Doctrine', which he very gladly gave. Annie Besant sent a note to Mme Blavatsky asking to be allowed to call. Thus through Mme Novikoff, Annie Besant was able to meet Mme Blavatsky.

(x) Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: It was H.P. Blavatsky, commonly known as 'H.P.B.', a Russian noble-woman of extraordinary endowments, who, on receipt of a cordial and flattering letter, invited Annie Besant to meet her. On a

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soft spring evening in 1889 Annie Besant walked from Notting Hill Station to the door of 17 Lansdowne Road, the residence of H.P.B., wondering what she would see behind the door.

In her own words Annie Besant narrates the story of her first meeting with H.P.B.: "Through folding doors thrown back, a figure in a large chair before a table, a voice vibrant, compelling, "My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you", and I was standing with my hand in her firm grip, and looking for the first time in this life straight into the eyes of 'H.P.B.' I was conscious of a sudden leaping forth of my heart - was it recognition? - and then, I am ashamed to say, a fierce rebellion, a fierce withdrawal, as of some wild animal when it feels a mastering hand". 1 Annie Besant expressed her desire to H.P.B. to know from her a little more of her sources of her knowledge but H.P.B. made only an informal chatting, talking nothing about her mysteries or occultism, merely just as a woman talks to her evening visitors. The meeting was utter disappointment to Annie Besant but as she rose to go, she writes "for a moment the veil lifted, and two brilliant eyes met mine, and with a yearning throb in the voice: Oh, my dear Mrs. Besant, if you would only come among us." 2

1. Ibid. p.441.
2. Ibid. p.442.
But Annie Besant though feeling "a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to bend down and kiss her, under the compulsion of that yearning, voice, those compelling eyes", hardened her heart to the hypnotic powers of H.P.B., said a common place polite good-bye and turned away.

Since 1886 there had been slowly growing up a conviction in Annie Besant that her philosophy of life was not sufficient to answer her own riddles: that life and mind were different than what she thought about them and to understand them fully was beyond her mental compass. At that time, just after the middle half of the nineteenth century many new sciences were making speedy progresses with the result that new vistas of knowledge were taking definite shape: Psychology, Hypnotism, Spiritualism, Clairvoyance, Clairaudience and thought reading were revealing unlocked for complex thought. Annie Besant studied the obscure sides of consciousness, dreams, dreams illusions, insanity, Supernaturalism, Spiritualism and experimented privately to find the truth. She read a variety of books but could find little in them that satisfied her.

At last Annie Besant convinced herself that there was some hidden power and she resolved to seek until she found, she writes, "By the early spring of 1889 I had

1. Ibid. p.
2. Loc. cit.
grown desperately determined to find at all hazards what
I sought. At last, sitting alone in deep thoughts........
I heard a Voice that was later to become to me the holiest
sound on earth, bidding me take courage for the light was
near".¹

That desired light was shed upon Annie Besant when
she got the book 'The Secret Doctrine' in two volumes
written by H.P.B., from Stead for review. Annie Besant
writes, "As I turned over page after page the interest
became absorbing; but how familiar it seemed; how my
mind leaped forward to presage the conclusion, how
natural it was, how coherent, how subtle, and yet how
intelligible. I was dazzled, blinded by the light in
which disjoined facts were seen as parts of a mighty
whole, and all my puzzles, middles, problems seemed to
disappear.........the light had been seen, and in that
flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was
over and the very Truth was found".² To understand fully
that found Truth Annie Besant went again to meet H.P.B.
to permit her to join Theosophy.

Annie Besant signed an application to be admitted
as fellow (as the members of the Theosophical Society
call themselves) of the Theosophical Society. After

¹. Ibid. p.440.
². Ibid. p.441.
signing her application and receiving her diploma Annie Besant hastened to 17 Lansdowne Road to report H.P.B. what she has done. There with tears in the eyes of both, pupil and the teacher, Annie Besant bent down herself before H.P.B. and received her blessings. From that day, '10th of May, 1889' Annie Besant never wavered her trust in H.P.B. and in Theosophy, and remained staunch Theosophist upto her last breath of life.

(xi) BP. Charles Webster Leadbeater: Annie Besant met C.W. Leadbeater for the first time in the year 1890 - neither of them could remember the day or the month - in A.P. Sinnett’s drawing room in Ladbroke Grove, London.
Annie Besant wanted to form new ties with some new intimates because after her conversion to Theosophy she had broken, either wholly or partially, most of her ties with the associates of her past life.

Annie Besant had been hearing about Leadbeater for some time in 1889 but had not yet met him. She had read in the papers some innuendoes about the record of the past lives of Leadbeater who was then an Anglican Curate in Hampshire and later received an enthusiastic Hampshire and later received an enthusiastic reception in Ceylon as a Buddhist and a Theosophist.

1. Annie Besant was formally admitted to the Theosophical Society on 21 May, 1889 (see the Golden Book of the Theosophical Society Adyar, Madras, 1925 p.102.
The first meeting of 1890 brought Annie Besant and Leadbeater close to each other and within four or five years her friendship with Leadbeater began to ripen into the most far-reaching influence in her whole life.

During the middle nineties Annie Besant's principal interest in England was "Occultism". She was deeply immersed in developing her occult propensities. Those days Leadbeater was coming into popularity due to his lectures and articles on occult and psychic psychology. He wrote a ninety-page booklet on 'The Astral Plane' and gained reputation. Annie Besant also published her 1894 Adyar Lectures, entitled 'The Self and Its Sheaths' for which the Founder-President of the Theosophical Society awarded her the highly prized Subha Rao Medal.

The similarity in their interests in Occultism, Hypnotism, Psychology and Psychic powers drew Annie Besant more near to Leadbeater. She offered him the post of Assistant Secretary to the European Section of the Theosophical Society. At this time Leadbeater had contributed his articles on subjects like "Dreams" and "The Aura" to the journals of the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater dealt the subject of dreams very scientifically discussing in detail such matters as physical, etheric and astral mechanism, the ego, the conditions of sleep on brain and different kinds of dreams with experiments on the dream-state.
When Leadbeater had written his book on dreams, four years before Sigmund Freud's book "The Interpretation of Dreams" had already been published in 1900, where the subject of dreams was interpreted in the light of his theory of sex, a large number of other psychologists were also working on similar issues. But Leadbeater's article on 'dreams: what they are and how they are caused' was based purely on the investigations along Theosophical lines.¹ At the same time Annie Besant had published her Queen's Hall Lectures under the title "Man and his Bodies".

In May 1894 Leadbeater was prompted by Annie Besant to make a specific investigation into the individual past of the man. By a process of spiritual concentration and psychic reconstruction Leadbeater discovered that while every body was there, he was able to look up to sixteen of the past reincarnations. Annie Besant became a collaborator of Leadbeater, though Leadbeater himself remained the key figure and did almost all the writing. In August 1895 Annie Besant accompanied Leadbeater, to an isolated country place known as "The Cottage" in Box Hall, Surrey, to concentrate and conduct a variety of Occult experiments. It was here that Annie Besant first learned to use her astral vision and to help Leadbeater with his investigations especially of 'devachan'.

¹ Leadbeater, C.W: Dreams: "What they are and how they are caused", Chapter I, Introductory, p.6.
In this fashion Annie Besant and Leadbeater made their investigations jointly for many years, which were jointly published in the form of books bearing the names of both of them on the title pages.

For writing their books "Man: Whence, How and Whither: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigations", both Annie Besant and Leadbeater had gone to Taormina in Italy. Working on the book Leadbeater in an inspired mood gazed into the akashic records and dictated his new observations of the past lives of the dedicated Theosophists. The wonderful book grew and grew. Annie Besant's role was only contributory, she always saw what Leadbeater saw and stimulated him with added details.

The mighty problem faced by the investigators had been pronounced at the opening of Chapter I written by Annie Besant: "Whence comes man and whither goes he? In the fullest answer we can only say: Man as a spiritual Being, comes forth from God; but the whence and whither with which we deal here denote a far more modest sweep. It is but a single page of his life-story that is copied out herein, telling of the birth into dense matter of some of the Children of Man - what lies beyond that birth - ing, O still unpenetrated Night? - and following on their growth from world to world to a point in the near future but some few centuries hence - what lies beyond that
cloud-flush in the dawning, O still unrisen Day? Here a struggle had been explained which was dualistic in nature, between spirit and Matter for the Mastery, when spirit finally becomes master, Man is no longer Man but Superman. Here Annie Besant deals with Man only as a Man, in his embryonic stage, in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdom. Man, in Annie Besant's thesis, starts his development from the human kingdom and ends with "Man and his worlds, the Thinker and his field of evolution".

The theosophic view of evolution, which Annie Besant recommended was opposed to the creative evolution of Bergson and it was purely influenced by Leadbeater and H.P.B.

Annie Besant wrote many books jointly with Leadbeater. Thought-Forms (1905), Occult Chemistry: A series of Clairvoyant observations on the chemical elements (1909), L'etere Dello Spazio (1910) and Man: Whence, How and Whither: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigations (1913).

Paying a tribute to Leadbeater on his 77th birthday Annie Besant said: "I, his nearest colleague, united to him by ties unbreakable, knowing him as none other living in the outer world knows him.......We strive together to serve our Elder Brethren, careful only to make ourselves

2. Ibid. p.2.
Other Persons: The story of the influences of some persons over Annie Besant's life and work does not finish here by mentioning only the association and close attachment of eleven persons to her, who influenced the course of her perennial philosophy and life, by one way or the other. There was also a band of other intellectual wayfarers who put their colourful impact on her at a certain stage of her life, that may not had proved of a very great significance to Annie Besant, but which did help in moulding her life and shaping her philosophy.

Names of some of the persons, who were associates of Annie Besant, are recorded as follows:-

A.P. Sinnett, Arthur Digby (Annie Besant's son),
Bhagwan Dass, B.P. Wadia, B. Shiva Rao, Col. Olcott,
Countess Constance Wachtmeister, C.P. Hamsawami Aiyar,
Edward Aveling, Esther Bright, F. Gordon Pearce,
George Lansbury, George Arundale, G.V. Shubha Rao,
G.W. Foote, Henry M. Hyndman, Herbert Burrows,
Iqbal Narsin Gurtu, Jedu Krishnamurti, John Burns,
Jamanadas Dwarkadas, Kanji Dwarkadas, Mabel Besant
(daughter of Annie Besant), Madan Mohan Malaviya,
M.K. Gandhi, Nand Kumar, N. Sri Ram, N.Yagnesuara Sastry, Rev. C.W. Leadbeater, Rev. Frank Besant (husband

(3) The Influence of Books and Authors: Had William Burton Pease Wood, the father of Annie Besant, loved longer the story of Annie Besant's life might have been totally different, but as things were, it was inevitable to avoid the actual course of events in her life. Annie Besant was hardly of five that her father died and she became a lovely girl in a family of three members—brother at school and mother working hard to earn for the destitute family—being left alone Annie Besant had to solace herself with weaving fairy tales around her or reading books at a very young age of five years. She writes "How or when I learned to read, I do not know, for I cannot remember the time when a book was not a delight. At five years of age I must have read easily, for I remember being often unwatched from a delightful curtain, in which I used to roll myself with a book".¹

Annie Besant had the habit of losing herself so completely in her books that she writes "my name might be called in the room where I was, and I never hear it, so that I used to be blamed for wilfully hiding myself, when

¹. Annie Besant: An Autobiography, p. 139.
I had simply been away in fairyland, or lying trembling beneath some friendly cabbage-leaf as a giant went by". ¹

Annie Beasent boldly criticises the materialistic tendency of her elders who did not allow her to develop her imagination, based on her study of the fairly tales, she writes "The dreamy tendency in the child, that on its worldly side is fancy, imagination, on its religious side is the germ of mysticism, and I believe it to be far more common than many people think. But the remorseless materialism of the day - not the philosophic materialism of the few, but the religious materialism of the many - crushes out all the delicate buddings forth of the childish thought, and bandages the eyes that might otherwise see.......clumsy grown-ups come along and tramp right through the dream-garden, and crush the dream-flowers, and push the dream-children aside....... But this tendency in me was too strong to be stifled, and it found its food in the fairly tales I loved". ²

Young Annie was so much fascinated by the reading of books that while describing her love for books, when she was hardly of seven years, she says, "In the study I would sit for hours with some favourite book - Milton's 'Paradise Lost' the chief favourite of all. The birds

¹. Ibid. pp.139-140.
². Ibid. pp.138-139.
must have felt startled, when from the small swinging form perching on a branch, came out in childish tones the "Thrones, dominations, princepoms, virtues, powers", of Milton's stately and sonorous verse. I liked to personify Satan, and to declaim the grand speeches of the hero rebel, and many a happy hour did I pass in Milton's heaven and hell, with for companions Satan and "the Son", Gabriel and Abdiel.".

When Annie Besant was between seven and eight years of age, she came across some children's allegories of a religious kind and a very little later she read "Pilgrim's Progress". In Miss Marryat's academy, when Annie Besant was hardly nine years old that she read some tales by Sir Walter Scott. She made a mention of a tale, in her 'Autobiography', of a horrid old woman "who glided up to the foot of your bed and sprang on it in some eerie fashion and glared at you". This story made for Annie Besant, going to bed a terror for many weeks.

Annie Besant's novel reading was extremely limited. Her mother regarded novels as ordinary love stories for unhealthy reading which caused pre-mature love dreams and unripe sentimentality in girls. She gave Annie Besant only the novels of Scott and Kingsley and not of Mrs. Braddon

1. Ibid. pp.130-131.
2. Ibid. p.143.
or Mrs. Henry Wood.

Not later than ten year's age Annie Besant got a great liking for literature. At that time she used to keep a list of books that she read so that she might not neglect her other work. She studied also some stray scientific works, but the number of such works was very limited. The atmosphere around her was literary rather than scientific. She read a translation of Plato with delight but unsatisfiable questionings of Socrates annoyed her. Lord Derby's translation of Iliad charmed her with its stateliness and melody. Dante was another favourite study of her. Among poets Annie Besant read Wordsworth, Cowper, Milton, Dante, Spencer and Southey. Writing about her study of these poets Annie Besant says "Wordsworth and Cowper I much disliked and into the same category went all the 17th and 18th century 'poets', though I read them conscientiously through. Southey fascinated me with his wealth of Oriental fancies, while Spencer was a favourite book, put beside Milton and Dante".1

Soon some strange mystic and religious writers won over Annie Besant a great fascination. She set a 'Library of the Fathers' on her book shelves, selected that one for piece de resistance. With her deep study of mysticism

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1. Annie Besant: 'Autobiographical Sketches' p.27.
and religion Annie Besant threw herself "ardently into a study of the question: 'Where is now the Catholic Church'? She read Pusey, Liddon and Keble, with many others of that school and many of the 17th century English divines.

At the age of fourteen or fifteen years Annie Besant became satisfied when she found that the practices and doctrines of the Anglican Church could not be knitted on to those of the martyrs and confessors of the early church, for it had not yet struck Annie Besant that the early church might itself be challenged. Annie Besant writes, "To me, at that time, the authority of the Jesus was supreme and unassailable; his apostles were his infallible messengers; Clement of Rome, Polycrap, the Barnabas, these were the very pupils of the apostles themselves. I never dreamed of forgeries, of pious frauds, of writing falsely ascribed to venerated names. Nor do I now regret that so it was; for without belief, the study of the Early Fathers would be an intolerable weariness; and that old reading of mine has served me well in many of my later controversies with Christians, who knew the literature of their Church less well than I".2

Annie's mother was very much interested in Annie's reading of books, she wished young Annie to spend her most

1. Ibid. p.26.
of the time in studies. Annie utilized her mornings and much of the afternoon in earnest study. Though her mother was under a constant pressure of the heavy burden of Annie's brother's school and college expenses and the domestic problems yet she always tried to send Annie with affectionate love to study books. Annie Besant writes "If I sometimes would coaxingly ask if I might not help by sewing in laces, or by doing some trifle in aid, she would kiss me and bid me run to my books." ¹

It were the two masters of the Harrow school, residing in the boarding house set up by Annie's mother in her house, who gave such books to Annie which made her to doubt in the Bible. These masters were the friends of Colenso, the heretic Bishop of Natal who did doubt the historical accuracy of the Bible. By reading the books, lent by the Harrow masters, written by Colenso, Stanley and Pusey, especially his "Daniel the Prophet" a doubt about the historical accuracy of the Bible was caused in her. Her mother did not like her reading such books. Annie Besant writes "My mother objected to my reading controversial books which dealt with the points at issue between Christianity and Free thought". ²

But the doubt was actually caused when in the Easter

¹. Ibid. p.25.
². Ibid. p.31.
of 1866 Annie Besant resolved to write a brief history of the Easter week, in order to facilitate the realisation of those last sacred days of God incarnate on earth, working out man's salvation but she found some apparent contradictions in the Bible. This caused the first doubt in her when she was of eighteen years, and went with her upto 1889 when she was of forty two years. In this span of somewhat more than, two decades Annie Besant remained a Free-thinker theist, atheist, secularist and socialist she read books written by Mc Leon Campbell, Robertson, Brighton, Mansel's lectures, Maurice's Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven' (a commentary on S. Luke) and many others which have no mention in her autobiography or biographical sketches. Annie Besant writes "Despite reading the argument, my scepticism grew only deeper and deeper. The study of W.R. Greg's "creed of Christendom" of Mathew Arnold's "Literature and Dogma", helped to widen the mental horizon, while making a return to the old faith more and more impossible. .......I was only a doubter, I spoke to none of my doubts. It was possible I felt that all my difficulties might be cleared up, and I had no right to shake the faith of others while in uncertainty myself. Others had doubted AND HAD afterwards believed; for the doubter silence was a duty; the blinded had better keep their misery to themselves".¹

¹. Ibid. p.60.
But it was H.P. Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine" that had definitely precluded doubts of all manner from the life of Annie Besant. In a reply to the letter of W.T. Stead, editor of "The Review of Reviews", asking her to give him briefly the genesis of her Theosophical development, Annie Besant wrote that she "could find no answer to problems of life and mind in Materialism, especially as touching -

1. Hypnotic and mesmeric experiments, clairvoyance, etc.
2. Double consciousness, dreams.
3. Effect on the body of mental conceptions.
4. Line between object and subject worlds.
5. Memory, especially as studied in disease.
7. Thought transference.
8. Genius, different types of character in family, etc.

"These were some of the puzzles. Then Sinnett's books gave me the idea that there might be a different line of investigation possible. I had gone into spiritualism, I went into it again, and got some queer results. But I got no real satisfaction until I got the 'Secret Doctrine from you to review. I ought to add that I had long been deeply troubled as to the "beyond" of all my efforts at social and political reform.......Here Theosophy, with its proof of the higher nature in man, came as a ray of light,
and its teaching of the training of that nature gave solid ground for hope. May I add that its call to limitless self-sacrifice for human good - a call addressed to all who can answer it - came to me as offering satisfaction to what has always been the deepest craving of my nature - the longing to serve as ransom for the race. At once I recognised that here was the path to that which I had been seeking all my life.¹

The other important books besides "The Secret Doctrine", which played a great role in moulding Annie Besant were the various Scriptures. The teachings as are found in Quran: "The God belongeth the East and the West; therefore wherever thou turnest thyself to pray, there is the face of God, for God is omnipresent and Omniscient" (Al Quran, ii.115), "All is from God" (Ibid,iv,77), "God seeth that which you do" (Ibid,ivii, 4)² and "No man is a true believer unless he desireth for his brother that which he desireth for himself" (The saying of Muhammad, 3)³ were absorbed by Annie Besant writing about the greatness of the teaching of Quran Annie Besant writes "No other facts are declared to be true on so weighty and united an authority as these, an authority stretching back beyond the

dawn of history......and constantly reinforced by new witnesses at the dawn of each successive civilisation, from Gennes to Muhammad".¹

The Bible had put a very deep impression on Annie Besant, in her early life. She fasted according to the ordinance of the Church and Christ was the figure round which clustered all her hopes and longings, till she often felt that the very passion of her devotion would draw him down from his throne in heaven. Annie Besant used to make prayers in which she found immense delight. Some of her prayers were as follows:

"O most sweet Jesus Christ, I unworthy sinner, yet redeemed by thy precious blood.....Thine I am and will be, in life and in death.

"O Jesu, beloved, fairer than the sons of men, draw me after Thee with the cords of Thy love"²

After her adhesion to Theosophy in 1889 Annie Besant was attracted towards the various Hindu religious scriptures, which played a great role in moulding her thought. "Bhagaved Gita", "Ramayana", "Mahabharata" and "Upanishadas" influenced Annie Besant greatly. She translated "The Bhagaved Gita or the Lord's song" into English with

². Ibid, p.162.
the help of a great Indian philosopher and her Theosophical colleague, Dr. Bhagwan Dass. In its preface she writes in its preface "since it fell from the divine lips of Shri Krama, on the field of battle and stilled the surging emotions of His disciples and friends, how many troubled hearts has it quieted and strengthened, how many weary souls has it led to him. It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead and where the Yogi dwells in calm and careless contemplation, while the body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall on his lot in life. That the spiritual man need not be a recluse, that union with the divine life may be achieved and maintained in the midst of worldly affairs, that the obstacles to the union lie not outside us but within us.......such is the central lesson of Bhagvat Gita".¹

The influence of Gita over Annie Besant was very great in 1905, when on the 30th Anniversary of the Theosophical Society, she delivered four lectures on the subject "Hints on the study of the Bhagavad Gita". Annie Besant divided her subject into four topics and explained Gita as (i) The great unveling, (ii) As Yoga

¹ Annie Besant: "The Bhagavad Gita", pp.11-12.
Shastra, (iii) Methods of Yoga and Bhakti, and (iv) Discrimination and sacrifice. Explaining the subject, Annie Besant says, "To understand the Gita, you must live it, and as you learn to live it, slowly the great meaning will dawn upon your intelligence; only as, step by step, the living is accomplished in the profound unveiling of the mysteries possible for the individual heart". In short Annie Besant declared that "He who can understand the complexity of the Gita can understand likewise the complexity of the world in which he lives."

"Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" had inspired Annie Besant to a very great extent. She delivered her lectures at the Central Hindu College Benaras, which were printed in two books: "The Story of the Great War" and "Shri Ram Chandra - the ideal King". Though both of these books are in very simple English and style, but her love and devotion for the Mahabharata and Ramayana is very clearly discernible in them. In her book "The Wisdom of the Upanishads" which is a collection of her four convention lectures delivered at the 31st Anniversary of the Theosophical Society in 1906, shows her attempt, in her own words, "to draw a few drops from the ancient wells

2. Ibid. p. 2.
of Aryan Wisdom, and to offer them to quench the thirst of weary souls, travelling through the desert, seeking for truth. The Upanishads . . . . . . stand alone as beacon lights on a mountain peak, showing how high man may climb, how much of the light of the self may shine out through the vessel of clay, how truly God may speak through man".  

Annie Besant had a clear understanding and reverence for scriptures and she wanted that all people of the world may have a deep knowledge of their respective scriptures and religions. So she delivered most of her lectures on the different religions of the world, where she freely quoted the scriptural reference in preaching "a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity". Her convention lectures of the Theosophical Society for 1896 entitled "Four Great Religions", and for 1901 "The Religious Problems in India" cover the subjects of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and Theosophy. These lectures clearly exhibit the influences of the scriptural heritage of the world on her and show how she was able to construct her theosophy on the basis of different scriptures.

(4) The Personal Sufferings: Annie Besant's personal sufferings were the birth-pangs where in a

1. Annie Besant: "The wisdom of the Upanishads" (from the foreward of the book) page iii.
realistic attitude about life was shaped which had contributed to the development of her various philosophical outlooks.

Annie was hardly of five years when she tasted her first suffering, when her loving and affectionate father suddenly died of consumption, whose death brought poverty to the family. Writing about the after-effects caused by the death, Annie Besant says, "Now began my mother's time of struggle and of anxiety. Hitherto since her marriage, she had known no money troubles, for her husband was earning a good income; he was apparently vigorous and well; no thought of anxiety clouded their future. When he died, he believed that he left his wife and children safe, at least, from pecuniary distress........but nothing was left for the widow and children, save a trifle of ready money". 1 Afterwards the whole family began to live poorly. But Annie's mother was much too strong a nature to remain prostrate even under such a blow. Left all alone, with a young family and next to no means, she never flinched, but worked hard to keep herself and also to find means for the education of her son.

At the age of nineteen Annie met a young curate, Frank Besant, who had a chance to stay with her for a

week and before he left, he proposed to Annie. Young religious Annie, while she was still awakening into womanhood, with emotions and passions dawning and not understanding the causes of the biological change in her, took Frank Besant by virtue of his office, a half angelic creature and an "Ideal Man". She writes "one very practical and mischievous result of this religious feeling is the idealisation of all clergymen, as being the special messengers of, and the special means of communication with, the "Most High". 1 Swayed by these feelings, Annie Besant considered the position of a clergyman's wife second only to that of the nun and she willingly got herself engaged to the clergyman.

At the age of twenty the marriage took place and started the most difficult period of her life. Annie's mother had kept young Annie totally ignorant of all her married life's duties and burdens. William T. Stead writes "she had kept her daughter ignorantly innocent of the nature of men and women, through the customary conventional delusion that ignorance is the same as innocence. It was then, as always, a blunder, and in her case a fatal blunder". 2

The unhappy married life dated from its very beginning, from the terrible shock to her "sensitive

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1. Ibid. p.36.
modesty and pride, her helpless bewilderment and fear.\textsuperscript{1} Her sufferings began at the outset of her marriage, Annie Besant writes "we were an ill-matched pair, my husband and I, from the very outset; he, with very high ideas of a husband’s authority and a wife’s submission, holding strongly to the "master-in-my-house-theory" thinking much of the details of home arrangements, precise, methodical, easily angered and with difficulty pleased. I, accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, impulsive, very hot-tempered and proud as Lucifer. I had never had a harsh word spoken to me, never been ordered to do anything, had had my way smoothed for my feet and never a worry touched me. Harshness roused first incredulous wonder, then a storm of indignant tears, and after a time a proud, defiant resistance, cold and hard as iron. The easy-going, sunshiny, enthusiastic girl changed — and changed pretty rapidly — into a grave, proud, reticent woman, burying deep in her own heart all her hopes, her fears, and disillusionments.\textsuperscript{2}

Annie Besant had been a very unsatisfactory wife from the beginning of her married life and she thought that she might gradually have turned into a fair imitation of the proper conventional type. Annie Besant did

\textsuperscript{1} Stead, William T: Annie Besant: A Character Sketch
\textsuperscript{2} Annie Besant: "An Autobiography", pp.177-178.
not know anything of household management or economical use of money because in the years before her marriage she never had an allowance or even bought herself a house-hold article except books. This type of life of Annie Besant was inexpressible tiring to the Rev-Frank Besant, whose quarreling insults and alleged violence put her into an almost hysterical condition. It was during July or August 1871 that her quarrels with her husband had increased in violence, and his retaliation had several times taken physical form. One summer night after one of these quarrels when Frank Besant was away Annie Besant in despair considered committing suicide when she heard a voice speaking clearly and softly: "O coward, coward, who used to dream of martyrdom, and cannot bear a few short years of pain". This brought out the warrior spirit in her and she threw the bottle of chloroform out of the window.¹

The companionship between Annie and Frank was not to last long. The unhappy life roused by harshness and injustice, stiffened and hardened, and lived with a wall of ice round her within which she waged mental conflicts that nearly killed her and thus she "learned at last how to live and work in armour that turned the edge of weapon

¹. Jinarajadasa, C: 'The Diamond Soul of Annie Besant' article printed in the Annie Besant Centenary Book, p.11,
that struck it, and left the flesh beneath unwounded".¹
Annie Besant began to make serious efforts at writing
'short stories of a very filmy character' in the Magazine
'the Family Herald' and earn some money to meet her some
urgent needs. When her first story called "Sunshine and
Shade". A tale founded on fact" was published on 2 May
1868, five months after her marriage, Annie signed it
"A.W." (Annie Wood) rather than "A.B." (Annie Besant), this
clearly shows that she still wanted to think of herself
as "Annie Wood".

Annie Besant was married in December 1867. She gave
birth to a male child on 16 January 1869, a little over
a year after her marriage, and to a female child on 28th
August 1870, with the result that Annie Besant had very
bad health due to premature birth of the girl in conse-
quence of a shock, which "was presumably from a blow which
her husband, who had refused to listen to her pleas on the
necessity of limiting their family, had struck her on the
shoulder, while simultaneously suggesting that she leave
him and go back home".²

In the spring of 1871 her both the children suffered
from the whooping cough. Annie Besant nursed them day and
night and her son, Digby, recovered soon but her daughter,

Besant'. p.46.
Mabel, having very delicate and weak constitution, due to pre-mature birth, remained fighting with death. With a constant hard labour of Annie Besant, Mabel also recovered but once she was out of danger Annie Besant herself collapsed physically and lay in bed for a week unmoving and struggled for three years and two months. This struggle, writes Annie Besant "transformed me from a Christian into an Atheist. The agony of the struggle was in the first nineteen months......a hell to live through at the time......Nothing but an imperious intellectual and moral necessity can drive into doubt a religious mind, for it is as though an earthquake shook the foundation of the soul, and very being quivers and sways under the shock.... The smooth brightness of my previous life made all the disillusionment more startling, and the sudden plunge into conditions so new and so favourable dazed and stunned me. My religious past became the worst enemy of the suffering present. All my personal belief in Christ, and my intense faith in His constant direction of affairs, all my habit of continual prayer and of realization of His presence.... all were against me now. The very height of my trust was the measure of the shock when the trust gave way". To Annie Besant God was not an abstract idea but a living reality.

Annie Besant further writes "All my heart rose up against this Person in whom I believed, and whose individual finger I saw in my baby's agony, my own misery, the breaking of my mother's proud heart under a load of debt, and all the bitter suffering of the poor. The presence of pain and evil in a world made by a good God; the pain falling on the innocent, as on my seven months' old babe; the pain begun here reaching on into eternity unhealed; a sorrow-laden world; a lurid, hopeless hell; all these, while I still believed, drove me desperate, and instead of like the devils believed and hated. All the hitherto dormant and unsuspected strength of my nature rose up in rebellion; I did not yet dream of denial, but I would no longer kneel".¹

When the physical crisis was over Annie Besant decided to act on her own lines. She writes "I resolved to take christianity as it had been taught in the churches, and carefully and thoroughly examine its dogmas one by one, so that I should never again say "I believe" where I had not proved, and that, however diminished my area of belief, that was left of it might at least be firm under my feet".²

Annie Besant found four problems pressing for immediate solution. She believed that people like her would also be

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¹. Ibid. p.188.
². Ibid. pp.195-196.
facing such problems and disputing every inch of their old ground of faith with the steadily advancing waves of historical and scientific criticism. These problems were:

1. The eternity of punishment after death.
2. The meaning of "goodness" and "love" as applied to God who had made this world, with all its sin and misery.
3. The nature of atonement of Christ, and the "Justice" of God in accepting a vicarious suffering from Christ, and a vicarious righteousness from the sinner.
4. The meaning of "inspiration" as applied to the Bible, and the reconciliation of the perfections of the author with the blunders and immoralities of the work.¹

Annie Besant had not brought into question some other vital problems of religion which also needed some solution by her. These problems were, the deity of Christ, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and other similar problems, taken by her after her legal separation from her husband.

After making her resolve, not to kneel before God,

there was no more doubt so far as Annie Besant's position towards the Church was concerned. She made a definite mind to leave it and "was willing to make the leaving as little obstrusive as possible".\(^1\) Annie Besant was ready to attend the Church services but to withdraw herself from the 'Holy Communion' because in that service, full of the recognition of Jesus as Deity, she could not join without hypocrisy.

In July or August 1873 the crisis came. Annie Besant was told by her husband, Frank Besant, to conform to the outward observances of the Church, and attend the Communion. Annie Besant refused. "Then came", writes Annie Besant "the distinct alternative; conformity or exclusion from home - in other words, hypocrisy or expulsion".\(^2\) Annie Besant chose the latter.

Annie Besant left her husband's house for good and thus her marriage tie was broken. Her mother's tears and pleading could not soften Annie Besant. She writes "I had been rigid as steel, but it was hard to remain steadfast when my darling mother, whom I loved as I loved nothing else on earth, threw herself on her knees before me, imploring me to yield. It seemed like a crime to bring such anguish on her; and I felt as a murderer as the snowy head was pressed against my knees. And yet - to live a lie?"

\(^1\) Ibid. p. 69.
Not even for her was that shame possible; in that worst crisis of blinding agony my will clung fast to Truth.¹

Annie Besant's mother was heart broken because she knew well that young Annie hardly of twenty-six years was inexperienced to face the difficulties of the future life.

Annie Besant had obtained her freedom with a great price, she writes "I was free. Home, friends, social position, were the price demanded and paid, and, being free I wondered what to do with my freedom."²

Annie Besant did many experiments to earn her bread. She possessed a small monthly income sufficient for only respectable starvation. She tried fancy needle work, and worked as a governess in a house where she had also to cook meals and sweep the rooms. She turned her jewellery and superfluous clothes into more necessary articles for her young girl, Mabel, so that she may not suffer a solitary touch of want.

In 1874 her mother died. The house was left to Annie Besant and her daughter totally desolated. The shock of the death was very severe to Annie Besant. The two months after the death were the most difficult for Annie Besant.

¹. Ibid. pp.215-216.
². Ibid. p.216.
In 1878 Annie Besant was deprived of her little daughter, Mabel. The deed of separation of Annie Besant from her husband had assigned her to have the custody of Mabel. While Annie Besant was busy in a case, a copy of petition was served to her which deprived her of her child's custody. The petition read "The said Annie Besant is by addresses, lectures, and writings, endeavouring to propagate the principles of Atheism, and has published a book entitled: "The Gospel of Atheism". She has also associated herself with an infidel lecturer and author, named Charles Bradlaugh, in giving lectures and in publishing books and pamphlets, whereby the truth of the Christian religion is impeached, and disbelief in all religion is inculcated.

"The said Annie Besant has also, in conjunction with the said Charles Bradlaugh, published an indecent and obscene pamphlet called 'The Fruits of Philosophy'.

The petition was heard before the Master of Rolls, Sir George Jessel, who was a man animated by the old spirit of Hebrew bigotry. He dealt the case roughly, coarsely, unfairly and decided the case against Annie Besant. Mr. Ince, the counsel on the other side argued an unfit

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1. The Knowlton Pamphlet Case, has been explained under the sub-head - 'The success of her early experiments'.

that Atheism and Malthusianism made Annie Besant an unfit guardian for her child and declared that Mabel, if educated by Annie Besant would "be helpless for good in this world and hopeless for good hereafter".\(^1\) Annie Besant argued her case in person but all her arguments fell on deaf ears. Annie Besant writes, "The absolute right of the father being declared, and a married mother held to have no sort of claim over her own children. The worst stigma affixed to marriage by the law of England is this ignoring of any right of the married mother to her child; the law protects the unmarried, but insults the married, mother, and places in the hands of the legal husband an instrument of torture whose power to agonise depends on the tenderness and strength of the motherliness of the wife. In fact the law says to every woman: "Choose which of these two positions you will have: if you are legally your husband's wife you can have no legal claim to your children; if legally you are your husband's mistress, then your rights as mother are secure".\(^2\)

The separation of the child made Annie Besant to resolve neither to see nor to write to her daughter until she was old enough to understand and judge for herself, Annie Besant writes, "I live in the hope that in her womanhood she may return to the home she was torn

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1. Ibid. p.161.
from in her childhood.\(^1\)

With the verdict of Sir George Jessel the tragic chapter in her life seemed to have been closed, but it was not so. It left a black mark on her heart. Her health gave way and after many years when she wrote her 'Autobiographical Sketches', she could not forget Sir George Jessel's brutality robbing her of her daughter. Annie Besant could never forgive Jessel even after his death, she writes "I have never forgiven Sir George Jessel, and I never shall, though his death has left me only his memory to hate".\(^2\) It will not be very surprising to know that during the years that followed the legal separation with her daughter Annie Besant felt, spoke and wrote bitterly of the pseudo-Christanity in whose name such things were done.

(5) The Success of Early Experiments:

It will not be out of place to consider here what would have happened if Annie Besant had not succeeded in her earlier experiments when she was passing through different social, political and religious movements of England. Sufferings, no doubt, improve the character of a person to a great extent, unless they do not completely overpower that individual. Whatever Annie Besant

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1. Ibid. p.169.
2. Ibid. p.77.
ability, however strongly her mind, it would have been really of no profit, if her early experiments had proved a complete failure. Though she had to undergo difficulties of temporary nature, yet she was successful in most of her experiments she made both in England and in India. Here some experiments, made by her in early years of life, need a detailed mention.

1 - Annie Besant's First Speech: On July 23, 1924, speaking at Queen's Hall - Jubilee Demonstration to Dr. Annie Besant, the great playwright George Bernard Shaw had said, "At this time Mrs. Besant was the greatest orator in England and possibly in Europe. I have never heard her excelled,"¹ but this excellence in delivering her speech was only revealed to Annie Besant when she made her first experiment to speak in the spring of 1873, when still at Sibsey with her husband. One day, being securely locked up in the great silent church, where she had gone to practise some organ exercises, Annie Besant tried to speak from the pulpit.

Explaining her successful venture in making her first speech Annie Besant writes, "I ascended the pulpit in the big, empty, lonely church, and there and then I delivered my first lecture. I shall never forget the

feeling of power and of delight which came upon me as my voice rolled down the aisles, and the passion in me broke into balanced sentences, and never paused for rhythmical expression, while I felt that all I wanted was to see the church full of upturned faces, instead of the emptiness of the silent pews. And as though in a dream the solitude became peopled, and I saw the listening faces and the eager, eyes, and as the sentences came unbidden from my lips, and my own tones echoed back to me from the pillars of the ancient church, I knew of a verity that the gift of speech was mine, and that if ever—and it seemed then so impossible—if ever the chance came to me of public work, that at least this power of melodious utterance should win hearing for any message I had to bring.  

Annie Besant kept a secret, about this power in speech making, for many months, she also felt it a thing of shame, rather than of pride, of foolish speechifying in an empty church. But that success in making first speech can trace out Annie Besant's mental growth that how that ordinary striving after that expression in spoken words later on had become to her one of the deepest delights of life.  

2- The case of Knowlton Pamphlet: Charles Knowlton, a Massachusetts doctor, had written a work with a title "The Fruits of Philosophy", the word "philosophy" being used more loosely than 'social science'. Its sub-title had somewhat guardedly given away its real content and purpose: 'The Private Companion of Young Married People'. This pamphlet was in accordance to with the Malthusian Principle of Population. Malthus had asserted that the world's population, if uncontrolled, would increase in geometrical proportion, whereas its food supply would increase only arithmetically. Malthus predicted dire consequences for mankind if man himself did not quickly find means to decrease the birth rate. Malthus, while concluding his thesis, suggested that it was birth itself that must be controlled and man's incontinence must be curbed.¹

The Knowlton pamphlet supported a planned family, in the spirit of Malthusian principle, "as over-large families among persons of limited incomes imply either pauperism, or lack of necessary food, clothing, education, and fair start in life children".² Dr. Knowlton advocated the restriction of the number of the family within the means of existence, and stated the means by which this

² Annie Besant: 'Autobiographical Sketches', p.112.
restriction should be carried out.

The Knowlton pamphlet was branded at Bristol as an obscene publication. Annie Besant, assisted by Charles Bradlaugh, determined to republish the Knowlton pamphlet in order to test the right of publication of such a book which would relieve people from poverty, the mother of crimes and would make happy homes where only want and suffering reigned. Annie Besant believed "that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political, or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all hazards". 1 Annie Besant did not endorse fully the medical views given in the pamphlet, she published it because she definitely understood that "progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where different opinions are suppressed". 2 Moreover the policy of the "National Reformer" newspaper, of which Annie Besant was the joint editor, was "atheistic in theology, republican in politics and Malthusian in social economy" and thus the Knowlton Pamphlet was republished by Annie Besant with full knowledge of the consequences.

To the pamphlet Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh supplied the following preface: "We believe with the

1. Ibid. p.121. Preface to the Knowlton pamphlet, written jointly by Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh.
2. Ibid. p.121.
Rev. Mr. Malthus, that population has a tendency to increase faster than the means of existence, and that some checks must therefore exercise control over population; the checks now exercised are semi-starvation and preventible disease; the enormous mortality among the infants of the poor is one of the checks which now keeps down the population. The checks that ought to control population are scientific, and it is these which we advocate. We think it more moral to prevent the conception of children, than, after they are born, to murder them by want of food, air and clothing. We advocate scientific checks to population because so long as poor men have large families, pauperism is a necessity, and from pauperism grow crime and disease.  

Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh further wrote in the Preface that "The wage which would support the parents and two or three children in comfort and decency is utterly insufficient to maintain a family of twelve or fourteen and we consider it a crime to bring into the world human beings doomed to misery or to premature death. It is not only the hand-working classes which are concerned in this question. The poor curate, the struggling man of business, the young professional man, are often made wretched for life by their inordinately large families, and their years are passed in one long battle to live;  

1. Ibid. p. 122.
meanwhile the woman's health is sacrificed and her life embittered from the same cause. To all of these, we point the way of relief and of happiness; for the sake of these we publish that others fear to issue, and we do it, confident that if we fail the first time, we shall succeed at last, and that the English public will not permit the authorities to stifle a discussion of the most important social question which can influence a nation's welfare." ¹

On April 5, 1877 both the publishers, Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, were arrested for publishing and selling the Knowlton pamphlet, considered to be obscene literature.

While the Knowlton case was dragging on through the courts, Annie Besant, in order to support her case, wrote a series of articles entitled: "Does Not the Bible Come Within the Ruling of the Lord Chief Justice as to Obscene Literature" (later published in condensed form entitled "Is the Bible Indelible?") while the appeal was pending Annie Besant brought out her own booklet on the subject of birth control, which she said would be written in a less 'coarse' style than Knowlton's and yet preserve its chief purposes. Her pamphlet entitled

¹. Ibid. p.122.

It took Annie Besant more than ten months to win the Knowlton case. On February 12, 1878 the final judgement was given in the favour of the publishers and they triumphed and were set legally free. The paper, 'Secular Review' commending on the victory published flattering biographical sketches of both Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh with photographs.

Annie Besant's success in the Knowlton case was not only her individual success but it was also a resounding triumph for the freedom of the press and a turning point in the history of birth control. As a result of Annie Besant's success and efforts, in 1879 Dr. Aletta Jacobs, a lady doctor, opened the world's first birth-control clinic in Holland and this movement spread all over the world.

3-Match Girls Strike: The period 1884-1886 marked to a certain extent a turning in Annie Besant from politics to practical social issues, to a study of the actual conditions under which the working classes of the country lived. These were not unknown to Annie Besant but she had never before faced them deliberately; she was striving to recognise the realities of the social system of England. She visited factories, slums and work-houses, and wrote
in her papers of what she found there. She influenced the Fabians to make schemes for discussing the working conditions of the poor.

Soon Annie Besant visited a match factory, Bryant and May, which paid an enormous dividends to the shareholders and very low wages to the match-workers. Annie Besant drew an immediate attention of the Fabian Society to the wages paid by the factory. She herself interviewed some of the girl workers, got lists of their wages, their fines and their family conditions. She published all these facts and called for a boycott Bryant and May's matches. A strike was arranged for few days in the Fleet Street. Annie Besant wrote articles, roused the clubs, held public meetings, got Charles Bradlaugh to ask questions in the Parliament, stirred up constituencies in which share holders were members, till the whole country rang with the struggle. Annie Besant influenced George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb and other active Fabians to work for the match-girls. Finally London Trade Council was made to act as arbitrators and thus a satisfactory settlement was arrived at. The match-girls went back to their work on better wages and good working conditions. A Matchmakers' Union was established, a strong woman's Trade Union in England and for years Annie Besant acted as Secretary.

The situation in the match factory became so congenial later on that Annie Besant asked for a match-girls
drawing-room having "a piano, tables of papers, for games, for light literature; so that it may offer a bright, home like refuge to those girls", who had no real homes, no play grounds save the street.

Knowing about Annie Besant's success in the match-girls strike, the tin-box makers, chain makers, fur-pullers, omnibus and tramway men approached her for getting help in solving their working and organizational problems.


2. Annie Besant's success, as a helper of the poor, caught the eye of an English poet, Gerald Massey who saw that Annie Besant, though an atheist was always championing the cause of the oppressed and he wrote a poem which is more striking because he had never met Annie Besant, he only knew about her. But in his poem he gave as brilliant a description of Annie Besant as has ever been given:

Annie Besant: A Greeting
By Gerald Massey

Annie Besant, brave and dear,
May some message uttered here
Reach you, ringing golden clear.

Though we stand not side by side
In the front of battle wide,
Oft I think of you with pride.

Fellow soldier in the fight.
Oft I see you flash by night
Fiery hearted for the right.

You for others sow the grain;
Yours the tears of ripening rain;
Thiers the smiling harvest gain.

Fellow workers: we shall be,
Workers for eternity;
Such my faith. And you shall see

Contd......
4—Election to the London School Board: During 1885

Annie Besant came to Tower Hamlets to seek the suffrages of the people as a candidate for the London School Board. She was elected in November as a Social Democrat, Secularist and a Champion of Trade Union Wages. It was a fierce contest, in which one clerical opponent, the Rev. Edwyn Hoskyns, the vicar of Stepney, hit Annie Besant below the belt by flooding his parish with thirty thousand anonymous handbills which contained baseless passages against Annie Besant; but Annie Besant headed the poll by a majority of nearly three thousand votes.

(Contd...from page 198)

Lif's no bubble blown of breath
To delude the sight till death,
Whatso'er the unseeing saith.

Love that closes dying eyes,
Wakes them too, in glad surprise,
Love that makes forever wise.

Soul—whilst murmuring, "There's no soul"—
Shall upspring like flame from coal.
Death is not life's final goal.

Bruno lives. Such spirit's come
Swords immortal, tempered from
Fire and Forge of Martyrdom.

You have soul enough for seven;
Life enough the earth to leaven;
Love enough to create heaven.

One of God's own faithful few,
Whilst unknowing it are you,
Annie Besant, bravely true.
Annie Besant was placed on the committee she had asked for: School management, works and by-laws. At Christmas time Annie filled her "Notes" column with case histories of starving families, exploited boys and girls, absenteeism from school because of child labour and infinitesimal wages. George Lansbury declares: "The next few years of her life and work amongst the most successful of any she has lived, for she secured by sheer persistence and personal endeavour a much higher standard of education for our children; but more important than all questions of reading, writing and arithmetic, it was her work which threw into prominence the absurdity of trying to educate half-starving children, and laid the foundation for the splendid system of medical examination and treatment now existing in all our elementary schools, coupled with the establishment of feeding centres". By the end of 1889 Annie Besant herself boasted proudly that she had been the means of raising £185 to provide some thirty-six thousand lunches for needy children.

Annie Besant did a very remarkable work in the London School Board but she resigned from the Board after joining the Theosophical Society.

1. Lansbury, George: 'Annie Besant As a Politician'. An article in "Dr. Annie Besant: Fifty Years in Public Work", pp.10-11.
Annie Besant’s success in the early experiments made her to take up many hard pursuits in her later age. Her opening the Central Hindu College Benares, in spite of very unsympathetic orthodox views of the people, shows her considerable success. Her launching the ‘Home Rule League’ movement in India and establishing ‘The Society for the Promotion of National Education’ with a ‘National University’ at Adyar under the Chancellorship of Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, won her a universal applause.

Her trials to follow Truth throughout her long life, made her to experience a variety of strange experiments. The height of her success can be measured by the very high regards to her by those who have always fought against her in her social, religious and political struggles.

(5) The Outer Appearance of Annie Besant’s Philosophy:

Annie Besant’s thought, as we have already referred to, was very rich and varied. She had enriched the several angles of philosophy - education, politics, religion - with great wisdom and had explained her philosophy as a historian. Her unique character derived its material from the fact that she was a historian of Indian culture possessing the art of a philosopher to handle the intricate problems. In this aspect of her versatility she presented a sign of her great vision. Annie Besant tried to explain a special line
of thought which enabled her to pull the different strings of philosophy, one by one, in constructing a meaningful school of thought. Therefore it would be worthwhile to examine the outer appearance of Annie Besant's philosophy for having a fuller understanding of her thought.

Annie Besant as a Historian of Indian Philosophy:

Like any serious historian of any subject Annie Besant tried to handle the facts of the past of Indian philosophy in order to reconstruct a history of the present time on the bases of spiritual heritage, legends, achievements of the past and continuing traditions of the philosophical minded people of so many centuries to awaken Indian people to the greatness of India's past and the possible future. Annie Besant with a thorough study of Indian culture and life, tried, in the words of Sri Prakṣa, "to discover our own country" for us and, as C. Rajgopalchariar said, help "young India to feel sure of the greatness of Indian culture and religion".

Annie Besant constantly made us aware, through speeches and articles, that we should not look upon our ancient culture as a static ruin and, in our difficulties

and despair, throw away the rich and accumulated experiences of the past into the heap of dust, considering it merely a putrid waste. Till her last day of life, writes Dr. Iqbal Harain Gurtu, Annie Besant "kept on reminding us that if India would be regenerated, purified and re-spiritualised, she (India) would become the 'priest-people of Humanity' and achieve her proper destiny". ¹

By applauding the India of the past, Annie Besant did not approve of the idea of re-introducing to the present fully what had been in the ancient times. She was aware of the fact that India could not be reconstructed if we "tread only in the foot-prints of the fast". ² She warned us not to be afraid to tread a new path. In her speech entitled "The India of Tomorrow", she says "The strange thing is that often men cling most passionately to the forms which do not really belong to the life......Co-operate in the building of the forms, and if a form does not succeed it will be broken; and you should be glad in the breaking of the useless form as you should be glad in the form that means success". ³ Annie Besant further says "Trust life, that is the great lesson for these days of change, for change is coming, change from every side. Those changes that are good will endure, and you must be very patient

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² Annie Besant: "The India of Tomorrow" an article in 'Builders of New India', p.487.
³ Annie Besant: 'India's Awakening' a lecture given in 'The Birth of New India, pp.24-25.'
while they are in the making". 

**Annie Besant's Principles of Historical Study of Philosophy:**

Annie Besant framed some important principles for making a historical study of the philosophy of a country. In the Theosophical Review of 1910 Annie Besant explained these principles which are as follows:-

1. No past condition of a nation can be reproduced, for a nation cannot re-tread the path along which it has evolved. Principles can be re-established, but the application of them must be adapted to the new environment.

2. A national ideal to be useful must be in harmony with the national character, and must grow out of the national past. It must be a native of the soil, not an exotic.

3. Every nation has its own line of evolution, and any attempt to make it follow the line of evolution of another nation would be disastrous ...... The world exists for the evolution of the Soul, and for this evolution varieties of experience are necessary. Races, sub-races, families, nations, like the two sexes, subserve evolution by their differences, and offer the variety of soil and culture which brings out the varied capacities of the Soul". 

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1. Ibid. p.25.
Annie Besant applied these principles in studying Indian philosophy and religion. She wanted to rebuild the India of the future on the foundation of the Indian life of the past, so that a mighty and spiritual organization may be built up for the uplift of humanity as a whole. "Her first work, therefore," writes Dr. Iqbal Harain Cortu, "in India was to attempt to revive her faith in spiritual awakening. We know how assiduously she worked for it and how eloquently she described the grandeur and sublimity of India's ancient ideals which were almost lost in the mist of antiquity".  

In the lecture, which Annie Besant delivered on board, the Kaisar-Hind, in the Indian Ocean, while coming to India for the first time, on November 5, 1893, she said "To me she (India) in very truth the Holy Land, the land whose great philosophy has been the source of all the philosophies of the western world, the land whose great religion has been the origin of all religions, the mother of spirituality, the cradle of civilization. When I think of India, I think of her in the greatmess of her past, not in the degradation of her present. For to-day but few of her children know anything of her great philosophy. To the mass of her people her mighty religion is veiled,

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becoming to the ignorant many a superstition, to the cultivated few but a poetical allegory. No longer the very life of the people, it is a form rather than a spirit.\(^1\)

Annie Besant further said, "So India fallen is the India of the present, while the India to which I would win your thoughts to-night is India unfallen, India as she was in her past, as she shall be in her future - mother once more in days to come, as in the days behind us, of art and of knowledge, mother of spiritual life and of true religion. That is the India I know; that is the India which has given to us the literature that I am going to say something of to-night; the India whose polity was built by King-Initiates, whose religion was moulded by divine men, the India which even so late as five thousand years ago felt her fields trodden by the feet of Shri Krishna, which even twenty-four centuries ago heard her cities echoing with the sublime morality of the Buddha; the India which later, when her great wars were over, had her poets who in the Mahabharata and in the Ramayana gave epic poetry to the world greater than that of Greece; dramatists who in later times still left treasures of beauty that the learned in the west are just beginning to appreciate. That is the India of which I have to speak - the India which as I said, is to me the Holy Land.\(^2\)

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1. Annie Besant: "India: Her Past and Her Future" an article in 'The Birth of New India' p.37.
Annie Besant's great love for India and deep devotion to Indian Culture made her to study the past heritage of Indian philosophy and religions. She, very carefully, studied the Indian history and philosophy of the ancient days and tried to bring out some lesson for the present and future. Her passionate appeal to young students of the Central Hindu College Benares, at one of the anniversary meetings of that institution, gives a glimpse of the vision of her spiritual lesson for Indian students. She said, "Aim at progress, my sons, strive to make India's future worthy of her ancient greatness. Outgrow your fathers in knowledge, outstrip your elders in devotion. For the days of India's greatness are by no means over; her future shall be mightier than her mighty past. India shall yield a power greater than the Imperial, if only her people will realize her true strength and utilize it, leading a life in which Spirit shall guide and love shall inspire".

Annie Besant's Methods in Pursuing the Historical Study of Indian Philosophy:

There are two methods in pursuing a historical study of Philosophy. One is to use the past as a basis for understanding the needs of the present and the other method

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is to treat the past as past and understand it as a historical fact of antiquity. Annie Besant makes use of the former method which makes Annie Besant a versatile philosophical historian of Indian philosophy rather than merely an academic historian. Her method of work is easily discernible from her one of the lectures, when she says "The present moment is peculiarly opportune......to awaken public feeling by urging ideals, by appealing to the greatness of the past, as an inspiration for effort in the present, to create greatness in the future". ¹ For reconstructing the Indian philosophy on some sure grounds, for the use of Indians, Annie Besant implored upon the use of 'impassioned rhetoric' to awaken the sleeping, to arouse the idolatry, to stimulate the slothful and to inspire with hope the Indian people who despaired of the future of India.

To study history on these lines Annie Besant did not resort to merely description and exposition of the India's past history but she tried to develop a constructive synthesis between the passionate description of the greatness of the past, the understanding of the true import of religions and also the impact of the factual knowledge of the ancient truth on the present time for a true regeneration of the country. Her lectures entitled: 'In defence of Hinduism', 'India's Awakening', 'India: her past and

her future', 'The Need for Ideals', 'Sri Ram Chandra - the Ideal King'. The Ancient Indian Ideals of Duty' etc. exhibit her treatment of the method.

The second method of treating the past as past, nothing less and nothing more, does not receive any approval by Annie Besant. Her approach to understand the past history is to use it for the present and future needs. The following quotation, from her one of the speeches, will explain her method in pursuing the historical study when she says. "If you go into Indian history at all, you will at once realize that the Nation that built up that history so many thousands of years ago, is a nation with a typical life of its own. It is capable of steady and constant evolution today".1 Annie Besant favoured that Indian people must turn back to the literature of the past, to the philosophy and the religion of her great days for inspiration and hope for the re-awakening of the present and future, because hope for a bright present has its essence in the greatness of the past.

History of Philosophy as Philosophy:

It is not an easy task to discover philosophy in its history. It needs a deep and critical understanding of the philosophical ideas in the writings of the past philosophers and also a knowledge of the personal background of

the philosophers so that a full import of their words may be grasped. As all philosophers are, to some extent, creatures of their times and their philosophies are conditioned by the circumstances which prevail at that time; so Annie Besant is in no way exception to this rule. She tried to answer the question of life which her time put to her. "No philosopher", writes Aldous Huxley, "is completely disinterested. The pure love of truth is always mingled to some extent with the need, consciously or unconsciously felt by even the noblest and most intelligent philosophers, to justify a given form of personal or social behaviour, to rationalise the traditional prejudices of a given class or community. The philosopher who finds meaning in the world is concerned, not only to elucidate that meaning, but also to prove that it is most clearly expressed in some established religion, some accepted code of morals".1

Annie Besant followed a method of reconstructing the philosophies of the past in their own environment to build a system of their philosophy to suit the present need of the Society. Annie Besant was not an arm chair historical academician but a mystical Karmayogin2 or a practical idealist with a definite meaning and purpose of history in view. She was not destined to write merely a

2. Datta, Hiren德拉 Nath: "Mrs. Besant as Karmayogin" an article in 'Theosophy in India, October 1931, p.201.
HISTORY of old times but to discover the philosopher himself rather than the outline facts of his philosophical thought. In attaining this aim Annie Besant was very successful as she brought back to life the great seers of the Upanishads, the great philosophical reformers like Sri Krishna and Buddha, the great epic personalities like Ram Chandra and the great law givers like Manu. While discussing the lives and philosophical works of the great celebrities of the past Annie Besant never hesitated to enter upon any controversial issue of any philosopher but tried to offer a thought provoking and daring solution to their week points.

But despite her very laudable efforts to explain the philosophy of Indian thinkers, Annie Besant had made some glaring mistakes in her explanations. She, most probably unknowingly, treated the philosophers of ancient India look alike and say somewhat the same thing. Her Buddha or Sri Krishna or Ram Chandra look so much similar that the special uniqueness and individual personality of any of these celebrities cannot be very ably grasped. The reason for this sort of errors in her philosophical exposition can be searched out in her over-busy engagements in the educational, political, social and religious movements of her time. Being a practical philosopher Annie Besant was busy in all her pursuits to serve humanity in all its
aspects. Theodore Besterman, her biographer, criticises her thought when he says "Abstraction, generalisation, philosophical thought, even analytical acuteness were beyond her; and......repeatedly fallible was her judgement".¹

The hostile criticism of Besterman does not dwarf the high stature of Annie Besant as a historian of philosophy. It is true that the interpretation of history of ancient philosophy does not receive a systematic consideration in the hands of Annie Besant and the exposition of it is not very authentic, but it must not be forgotten that Annie Besant was not writing the history of Indian philosophy with the aim of explaining the trivial issues of philosophical thought. Her necessity in writing the Indian philosophy was for, in the words of Bishop Arundale "the revival of ancient spirit in religion".² Her aim in studying Indian philosophy and writing on the age old epic period was only for inspiring Indians, writes Muthulakshmi Reddi "in favour of Hindu thought and culture at a time when India's own sons and daughters were becoming strangers to their own religion and culture and were beginning to think that their ancestors were barbarians and forgetting to learn even their own mother tongue, much less the language of the Vedas and the Upanishads. It was Dr. Annie

Besant who translated in simple and pure English not only the Gita, but also compiled small book-lets containing tales of Aryan greatness for the use of boys and girls. That was how the whole world came to know India’s spiritual treasures which were engulfed in centuries of darkness and oblivion. She was the one who brought the light and illumined the hidden treasures of Indian thought.¹

We may have been either right or wrong in judging Annie Besant as a philosopher of history or a historian of philosophy; it is open to approval, to criticism and to reprobation; but we cannot deny the fact about her tender heart, her earnest and disinterested labour and her laborious self-sacrificing life in justifying India’s great religious and rich philosophy as an inseparable part of the life of India.

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Causes that led to Annie Besant’s Arrival in India in 1893.

Annie Besant put her foot on Indian soil for the first time on November 16, 1893 at 10.24 A.M. and the place was the tiny coastal town of Tuticorin in the south. She wanted to come to India earlier in 1891 and 1892 but as two conditions necessary for her coming to India were

¹ Reddi, S. Muthulakshmi: "The Religious and Social Reformer", an article in the 'Annie Besant Centenary Book', p. 60.
not fulfilled - Medical assurance that her health would bear the Indian hot climate, and enough money to cover the cost of tour and other payments to be made by her — so, she did not come. The physician had frightened her by telling that if she went to India and lectured as proposed, she would not return alive. It was believed that already overstrained by the hard and heavy work of the year that fell on Annie Besant, the hot and bracing climate of India, the arduous sea-voyage and the complete change of life conditions would not be congenial to Annie Besant and these opinions were enough to delay her visit. But her desire to come to India was so intense that though necessary money to meet her immediate expenses had not been raised and physician's advice about her health had not been sought, yet Annie Besant at last came to India in 1893.

It would not be sufficient to say that because Annie Besant wanted to come to India, so she came. There were some authentic recognised causes which influenced her attitude of mind and brought her to India, a country totally new for her. The causes may be summed up as:

1. Interest in Indian situation,
2. Theosophical Work,
3. Call for Educational Renaissance, and
4. Attachment by Previous Incarnations.
Each of these causes had had its share in influencing Annie Besant's life and work. Her study of the Indian Philosophy and Culture had quickened the rate of her love for India and proposed her to come to India, which was "the Holy Land" for her.

1. Interest in Indian Situation: Annie Besant had a great interest in India. Her interest was not created by her adoption of Theosophy. A full ten years before she joined the Theosophical Society in 1889, saw her entering a passionate defence of India against the policy of Lord Disraeli in England and Lord Lytton in India. In 1879 Annie Besant published through her Freethought Publishing House, a pamphlet entitled "England, India and Afghanistan or why the Tory Government gags the Indian Press: A Plea for the Weak against the Strong".

Anticipating protest against her criticism of England's conduct in India, Annie Besant wrote in her pamphlet: "It is said to be unpatriotic to blame one's country. But not so have I read England's noblest patriots. Love of England does not mean approval and endorsement of the policy of some Oriental adventurer whom chance and personal ability and unscrupulousness have raised to power. Love of England means reverence of her past, work for her future; it means sympathy with all that is noble and great in her history, and endeavour to
render her yet more noble, yet more great; it means
triumph in her victories over oppression, delight in
her growing freedom, glory in her encouragement of all
nations struggling towards liberty!......it means con-
demnation of her bullying, boasting, cruel imperialism.
....and regretful remorseful turning back to the old
paths of duty, honour, and of faith.

"Therefore this plea of mine for the weak against
the strong is not an unpatriotic attack on our own
beloved land, but rather the loving effort of a child
to save a mother whose honour and whose life are threat-
ened by unscrupulous betrayers".¹

Annis Beasnt's previous associate in Free-thought
movement, Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., who had a great sympa-
thy for India and whose pro-Indian attitude was freely
known in the house of commons,² was invited in 1889 by
the Indian National Congress to attend its fifth annual
session. A warm welcome was accorded to Bradlaugh, his
name was kept on many roads, parks and halls, and he was
received as a guest of honour in many cities of India.

2. Sitaramayya, B.Pattabhi: "The History of the Indian
National Congress", p.80. "Bradlaugh prepared in 1889
a draft Bill on the Reform of the Legislative Councils
and circulated it. It embodies the views of the
Congress as expressed till then, and the Congress in
accordance with his wishes drafted certain proposals
embodying the mature opinion of the Indian people on
the subject. The Bill was dropped later. But
Bradlaugh's position in Parliament was so strong......
his second Bill was accepted".
The story of a great honour given by Indians to Bradlaugh reached Annie Besant. Her interest in India and Indian situations greatly increased by the news and verbal discussions with Bradlaugh. Enchanted by the glorious records of Bradlaugh's winning laurels in India, Annie Besant persuaded H.P.B. to allow her to visit India in 1890, but due to her bad health and sudden death of H.P.B. that plan could not mature. At that time one English paper, 'St. Stephen's Review' reported that Annie Besant would also go to India and that "she had already engaged the services of a Mooshee to teach her Hindustani and Sanskrit". ¹

2. Theosophical Work: Annie Besant must be drawn towards India for doing work for Theosophy, as her biographer Geoffrey West writes: By any reckoning the Theosophical must be declared the most important of all influences in Mrs. Besant's life, if only because it brought her to India, the scene........of some of her most enduring labours. India was, of course, the Headquarters of the Society and the home of the Masters". ²

It is very easy, but interesting, to form a connection between Theosophy and Annie Besant's social and political work. Annie Besant spent all her earlier life

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in England as merely a preparation for the work her Masters were to set before her in India; and she avowed that in every sphere of action she worked under their guidance. So theosophy brought Annie Besant to India.

Annie Besant made herculean work in India under the banner of Theosophy and Theosophical Society, which did not cease up to her last breath of life. She worked untiringly for social, educational, political, religious and cultural regeneration of the modern India. She wrote pamphlets, stories and books for the inspiration of Indian youth; she founded the Central Hindu College, Benares, schools for the girls and the depressed classes and founded a National University, delivered lectures about Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and different religions of India; she worked for social reform on religious lines and a home-rule movement for India. Her incessant efforts, to arouse whole of India to win freedom, cannot be denied. All these efforts by Annie Besant made her the prophet of Indian Nationalism.

3. Call for Educational Renaissance: Annie Besant’s work of teaching classes in the Hall of Science, which was organized by Dr. Aveling and sponsored by Charles Bradlaugh, and her grand work in the London School Board, made many Indian Theosophists to admire her excellent capacity to administer and build educational institutions on Theoso-
phical lines. B. Sanjiva Rao writes: "In the winter of 1891, she was invited by the General Secretary of the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society to come to India, because he found the educated youth of India steeped in materialism, and there was no intellectual basis on which a nobler idealism could be founded. But it was only two years later that Dr. Besant landed on Indian soil". 1

After making a tour of whole of India in 1893-94 Annie Besant definitely realized a need for national education for the Indian people. At Benares she met great Sanskritists and scholars like Dr. Bhagwan Dass, Professor Chakravarty and Pandit Gangadhar Shastri and understood a great paucity of a Hindu College in northern India which flowered into a full-fledged College in 1898 by the name of Central Hindu College, in the old Aryan style.

Annie Besant's exclusive concern with the educational problems in 1893 may be judged from her farewell message before she left after her first visit to India. Annie Besant said "India that I love and reverence, and would fain see living among the nations, is not an India westernized, rent with the struggles of political parties, heated with the fires of political passions, with a people ignorant and degraded, while those who might have raised them are

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fighting for the loaves and fishes of political triumph...
The India to which I belong in faith and heat is.......a
civilisation in which spiritual knowledge was accounted
highest title of honour, and in which the people revered
and sought after spiritual truth.......The India I would
give my life to help in building is an India learned in
the ancient philosophy, pulsing with the ancient religion —
an India to which all other lands should look for spiri-
tual life — where the life of all should be materially
simple, but intellectually noble and spiritually sublime...
I honestly believe that the future of India, the greatness
of India, and the happiness of her people can be secured....
only by the revival of her philosophy and religion. To
this, therefore, I must give all my energies".¹

The Central Hindu College, Benares, founded by
Annie Besant in 1898, made incessant efforts to revive
the ancient philosophy and religion through its education.

4. Attachment by Previous Incarnations: Annie Besant’s
biographer, Geoffrey West, writes about her that "In
becoming a Theosophist she acquired not only an unexpected
future but also an unsuspected past".² After joining
Theosophical Society Annie Besant, through the use of
clairvoyance for research into the past, traced out the

¹ Mrs. Besant’s farewell message before she left after her
first visit, quoted in the book "Mrs. Annie Besant" by
story of her own forty-six previous lives in succession.

It would be useless to go into the details of all the previous incarnations of Annie Besant as recorded by her. It would be sufficient to mention, in the words of Annie Besant's biographer, Theodore Besterman that "in A.D. 350 Mrs. Besant was incarnated as Hypatia, and in the sixteenth century as Giordano Bruno".\(^1\) Annie Besant was sure that in her immediate previous birth she was born as an Indian.

Kanji Dwarkadas, a close associate of Annie Besant writes "To Mrs. Besant, reincarnation was not just a popular and superstitious belief. She knew it to be a fact. Her previous incarnations were inter alia, Giordano Bruno and Hypatia of Alexandria and she told me that she was a Kashmiri Brahmin and passed away in 1843 to be reborn four years later as Annie Wood".\(^2\)

Annie Besant gave a characteristic reply on October 12, 1892 to the letter of the Indian Theosophists, Annie Besant wrote: Ere long I hope to stand face to face with you, I to whom India and the Indian peoples seem nearer than the nation to which by birth I belong. In heart I am one with you, and to you by my past I belong. Born

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last time under Western skies for work that needs to be done, I do not forget my true motherland, and my inner nature turns eastward ever with filial longing. When Karma opens the door I will walk through it, and we will meet in body as we can already meet in mind". 1

Karma proved propitious and opened the door next year, and Annie Besant walked through it, arriving in India in 1893. How she felt, when her feet touched the Indian soil, has thus been placed on record by Annie Besant, she says "When I landed here for the first time, I knew what love of country meant. For then the whole life came out into flower and taught me the fragrance of the land that is your own, the love of a crowd merely because they are fellow-countrymen, and the feeling that at last you have come to the place you have loved and tried even blindly to serve before yet you have had trodden on its soil". 2

Thus all the four causes, explained above, seem responsible for Annie Besant's arrival in India in 1893.

1. Letter of Annie Besant to the Indian Theosophists, noted by Annie Besant in her "Biographical Notes", pp. 473-74.
2. quoted by Hirendra Nath Datta in his article "Mrs. Besant as Karmayogin" printed in 'Theosophy in India', Special October Number of 1931.
Educational Reform Movements underway at the time of Annie Besant's arrival e.g., Revivalists like Dayananda AND Vivekananda and Modernists like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan:

It would be a thing of great interest to know briefly how far the Indian educational renaissance had taken shape at the time of Annie Besant's arrival in India for the first time. It would require the services of some seasoned historian of Indian education to trace and record in a systematic manner the different educational pursuits, of the late nineteenth century, made by the hands of social and educational reformers of India; nevertheless it is a psychological problem of a very high order, closely connected with the history of Indian civilisation, though not worthy for this stupendous job, I had made an effort, it may seem clumsy one, to explain the educational reform movements underway at the time of Annie Besant's arrival in India.

Annie Besant was 46 years old when she came to India, Dayananda was already assassinated ten years back when he was 59, Vivekananda was 30 and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan 76. All these reformers, though of different age but had one thing in common that they had done a very remarkable spade work for the cause of Indian National education and
had designed some solid educational policies according to their philosophical ideologies, so the educational renaissance of India in that time like India's great Banyan tree, had numerous shoots, which might appear as separate, but had all a common root, a common purpose to educate the common lot of people. Though all these great men were contemporaries but were not fashioned after one pattern. Each one of them had individuality of his own. There could be no single standard by which to measure them all. As no one in this world can remain uninfluenced by the immediate environment in which he grows up and as environment never being the same for all, so these educational reformers developed different qualities in different measure.

One accepted standard in judging great men is to find out the good those men had done to the world, the extent to which they had helped the common people, the level of happiness and prosperity to which they had raised mankind and the intellectual advancement.

In this slender portion we shall make an estimate of the educational pursuits of Dayananda, Vivekananda and Syed Ahmed Khan -- leaving aside the other fields of their social work -- because the scope of the project, in hand, is limited to the educational boundaries. Here
the import to write on these reformers, as educationists, is to understand the educational milieu in India when Annie Besant arrived and worked for diffusion of education.

In order to understand the contribution, of these social thinkers, to the cause of education, we shall separately deal them one by one.

(a) Dayananda (1824-1883)

It was significant that the first great Hindu revivalist, Dayananda Saraswati, was not mere a Hindu reformer but was also an educationist of a very high rank, better to be known as a World Teacher because his mission was not for the good of Hindus but for the uplift of all mankind.

Dayananda denounced the evils prevalent among the Hindus -- the idol-worship, the caste-system, untouchability, child-marriage, enforced widowhood and class privileges. He loved all mankind and his aim was to save men from degradation and falsehood.

Dayananda and his teaching were the products solely of Hindu Shastras and Hindu culture. Writing about Dayananda Har Bilas Sarda says "Foreign Culture, Western Civilization had not the slightest influence in making him what he was. He did not know English and was in no way influenced by European culture or European thought."

Before we attempt at the understanding of the educational thought of Dayananda, it would be essential to know a little about his life and work.

Dayananda's early career differed very little from those of other mystics and regional saints of India. Known in early life as Mula Sankar, Dayananda was born in 1824 at Tankara, in Morvi state in Gujarat. He grew up in a well-to-do orthodox Shaivite family. His Sanskrit education began at the age of five and when he was of fourteen years, he had memorised several parts of the Vedas and Panini’s Sanskrit grammar. At the age of fourteen he found doubt in the worship of idols and began to meditate upon the instability of human life on the death of his younger sister and old uncle.

Dayananda’s parents made arrangements for his marriage, he steadily left home at the age of twenty-one. He adopted the life of an ascetic (sadhu) in order to solve the mystery of life and death. For fourteen years, from 1845 to 1860, he wandered incessantly, all

1. Dayananda: "Autobiography of Pandit Dayanand Sarasvati" pp.5-6. The story of Dayananda’s early disbelief about idol-worship has been explained by his in his autobiographical fragment written for the Theosophist journal. He says "I feel it impossible to reconcile the idea of an Omnipotent living God, with this idol, which allows the mice to run over his body and thus suffers his image to be polluted without the slightest protest".
over the upper and larger part of India, like the Buddha, in search of Truth, and until 1860 he could not find any teacher well versed in the Vedas, having a critical approach to popular religious beliefs to satisfy Dayananda's quest and standards.

In 1860 Dayananda found a blind guru, Virjananda, who was an intellectual giant having a great iconoclastic fervour and arbitrary interpretations of the Vedas. Dayananda remained with his guru for nearly four years, at the end of which he took leave of him. "Swami Virjananda charged Dayananda with the duty of devoting himself to the mission of uplifting the country, the rescue of the sacred books, the removal of sectarianism and finally the promulgation of Vedic religion throughout the world". The year 1868 marked the end of Dayananda's seclusion and spiritual searchings and start of his active career of a reformer.

Dayananda was very ambitious thinker as he wanted to bring a sudden new light into Hinduism and inject human values into ossified social customs of his time. Besides engaged in public debates on the Shastras with established pandits, Dayananda wanted to overthrow the entire order of popular Hinduism in a single, ruthless throw. Dayananda challenged his opponents in many debates

1. Dayananda commemoration Volume, p.x iv.
on shastras (shastrarthas) and he was always victorious in his interpretation of the true spirit of Vedas.

In 1870 Dayananda began the work of systematization of his religious beliefs and in 1874 he gave dictations of his most important of all the works, Satyarth Prakash (Light of Truth) written in Hindi, to obtain a wide circulation in Hindi-knowing public. In the introduction to this work Dayananda formulates his ideal of life: "My chief aim in writing this book is to unfold Truth, which consists in expounding truth as truth and error as error. Our aim has been to further the advancement and good of mankind, and to help men in the ascertainment of Truth whereby they could embrace the truth and reject falsehood, because there is certainly no other way of elevating the human race". 1

Dayananda was a widely travelled reformer who travelled all over India, except Madras, met the leaders of the other reform movements and discussed his views on religion, God and Culture. He met Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chander Sen of the Brahma Samaj, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade of the Prarthana Samaj, Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society, Syed Ahmed Khan, the Muslim Modernist and many others and impressed

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all by his sound knowledge. Madame Blavatsky was "perfectly certain that India never saw a more learned Sanskrit scholar, a deeper metaphysician, a more wonderful orator and a more fearless denunciator of any evil, than Dayanand, since the time of Sankaracharya."¹

Dayananda died at Ajmer on October 30, 1885 at the age of fifty nine, in him passed away a master spirit, a devoted reformer to the cause of Aryan regeneration.

The educational thought propounded by Dayanand is based on his Vedic philosophy, therefore a brief survey of his philosophy will require a mention before we explain his educational thought.

Dayananda disapproved the idea that the world that we know by sense-perception is unreal. He proves this thesis with the help of some epistemological theories given in dialogue form, which look like Plato's dialogues. Dayananda argued that the objects exist independent of our perception of them and have a reality of their own.

In order to prove that God created this world separate from Himself, Dayananda writes, "had He not created this world, how could He have been able to award souls their deserts, and how could they have reaped the fruits of their deeds -- good and evil -- done in the previous

cycle of creation? If you were asked, what is the function of the eyes, you could only say, 'sight, of course'. In the same way, of what use could the knowledge, activity and power of creating the world be in God other than that of creating? Nothing else. The attributes of God, such as justice, mercy, the power of sustaining the world;¹ Dayananda held God to permeate the whole universe, having creating, sustaining and dissolving powers. To him God is an active and creative agency having no form but infinite energy. According to Dayananda though God created the universe, yet matter existed before the process of creation took place.

Dayananda believed in souls, which took on physical forms when they were born as human beings. To Dayananda souls were not parts of God but had separate existence, governed by their good or bad deeds. "God can never become the soul, nor can the soul become God. They can never be one. They are always distinct from each other".² Man's soul is closely attached to his body. All psychic behaviour of the body is due to soul. "It is the soul that thinks, knows, remembers and feels its individuality through the organs of thought, discernment, memory and individuality. It is, therefore, the soul that enjoys or suffers....it is

². Ibid. p.278.
the soul that .... does acts — good or evil — and consequently it is the soul alone that reaps the fruits thereof — joy or sorrow. The soul is not a witness of acts. It is the actual doer that reaps the fruits of deeds alone .... The soul is not God and, consequently, it is not the seer of acts (but the actual doer). Dayananda held that responsibility for the actions, by claiming that human deeds were predetermi ned, could not be avoided.

Though Dayananda did not find relationship between soul and God, yet he accepted the doctrines of Transmigration and Karma, according to which soul may be reborn in bodies for indefinite number of times before achieving mukti. Luckily these were the only doctrines of traditional Hinduism, transmigration of soul and Karma, which were fully accepted and recommended by Dayananda. Though he opposed the current basis of caste but he held fast to the Vedic notion of the four Varnas or classes. He believed that according to the life led by a man his Varna could be changed.

Dayananda based all his philosophy on the four Vedas alone which to him were the paramount Religious Code, being the words of God. Except Vedas he was not prepared

1. Ibid. p. 275.
to accept any other authority. If any other work agreed with the teachings of the Vedas, Dayananda also accepted it, but only as a secondary source.

Dayananda wanted to regenerate the society of his times, for achieving that aim he approached education of the people from a rational standpoint. His 'Satyarth Prakash' is a treatise on his educational philosophy, besides being an epitome of religion and social reform.

Dayananda was careful about education of the children since their very infancy up to the highest levels. He says "From the birth upto the age of five children should be instructed by the mothers, and from the sixth year to the eighth, by their father. In the beginning of the ninth year.....boys and girls should be sent only to those seminaries which are provided with best teaching staff of males and females".¹

Under the guidance of mother the children should learn Sanskrit alphabets and also those of foreign languages. Children should be encouraged to memorize such vedic poetical and prose pieces which may inculcate in them all desirable virtues. When the very young children begin to speak, the mother should contrive means so that the tongue of the child may acquire flexibility to pronounce distinctly.

¹ Sen, M.B. "Wisdom of Swami Dayananda", p.52.
Dayananda recommends that from the age of plus five to eight years the father should take the responsibility of the instruction of the child. He writes "whom the children are able to express and grasp the words, they should be taught properly with the eldvers, with those who are younger in age, with men of distinction, with father, mother, the king, and learned men, how to treat them and how to associate with them. All this should be done in order that there might be no occasion for ill behaviour and they might command due respect everywhere". At this stage the children should be taught Devanagri and foreign scripts. They should commit to memory, with meanings; the Mantras (Vedic verses), Shlokas (couplets), Sutras (aphorisms), prose, poetry, bearing upon proper instruction. Whatever is unrighteous and superstitious should also form the subject of advice so that they might not fall prey to false beliefs e.g. ghosts and spirits.

Dayananda advised that after the age of eight years children should be sent to schools where teachers of good character, whether male or female, teach. Only such persons should be allowed to undertake the work of teaching who are thoroughly educated and virtuous. The teachers should so try as to make their pupils true in words, thoughts and deeds, cultured, self-controlled, mannerly,

1. Ibid. p.113.
physically and morally strong and well-versed in the Vedas and other scriptures. Dayananda was very strongly against co-education. He advised to open separate schools for boys and girls after they attain the age of eight years. He recommended that "the place of study should be secluded and girls' and boys' schools should be two Kosas (about four miles) apart. The teachers, servants and menials should all be female in girls' schools and males in boys' schools."  

Dayananda suggested to the students that "as long as they are Brahmacharis (male-students) and Brahmacharins (female-students) they should keep themselves aloof from eight kinds of sensualities — looking at the person of opposite sex, contactual relation, private meeting, conversation, love-story telling, intercourse, contemplation of a tempting object and company. The teachers should also keep them away from the above mentioned things so that they may increase their happiness by attaining sound education, training, refined manners, good habits and strength of body and the soul".  

Dayananda suggests that the seminaries (gurukulas) of the children must be at least about eight miles away from town and cities. There the students should live a

1. Ibid. p.53.
2. Ibid. p.44.
life of austerity. All children should be treated alike in matters of food, drink and clothes. The children should not be after the comforts of the body but should be free from the cares of the world so that they may devote themselves exclusively to their studies. During the student days the children should not be allowed to meet their parents so that they may not find any kind of distraction in their studies.

In the system of education of Dayananda the first thing the parents and teachers should teach to the children is the Gayatri Mantra. After teaching this Mantra the children should be taught the different items of daily prayer such as bathing, sipping water (achman) and breath exercise (pranayama). The pranayama should be taught to both the boys and the girls.

Dayananda recommended one system of education for all people. He gave equal status to man and woman, a Brahmana and an untouchable. Dayananda favoured a classless society where all the four varnas would receive education together.

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1. A hymn of the Yajur Veda, XXXVI, 5, an invocation to God.
2. This consists in taking up a little water in the palm of one's hand and applying it to the lips in order to relieve the irritation of the throat.
3. A very well organised process of deep breathing which burns off all impurities and exalts the soul.
It would be a matter of great interest to know that Dayananda had given five tests for the careful examination of the learning of the people. These were:

"1. Whatever is in agreement with the qualities, functions or nature of God and conforms to the Vedas in truth. The reverse is untruth.
2. Whatever tallies with the laws of nature is truth and what does not is untruth.
3. Whatever is in consonance with the rules of conduct of the learned, truthful and fraudfree people is acceptable and the contrary is unacceptable.
4. Purity of the self should be attained through education.
5. There are eight proofs of sources of knowledge: (i) intuition (Pratyaksa), (ii) inference (Anumana), (iii) Comparison (Upmana), (iv) Verbal knowledge (Shabda), (v) tradition (Aitihya), (vi) presumption (Arthapatti), (vii) probability (Sambhava) and negation (Abhava)."

Dayananda was confident that by means of these five tests, explained above, one can ascertain what is right and what is wrong. He advised the teachers to examine...
everything on the criteria of these tests whatsoever they would like to teach to the students. The children should also follow these tests in accepting anything for them. If the students and teachers would not employ these tests in their education, the whole educational system would surely become a useless monotony where the students would become crammers and teachers tape-recorders of the books. So in examining any good thing in education these tests must be made use of.

Dayananda died in 1883 after doing reformation of the society hardly for eight years. But the ball set rolling by Dayananda caught momentum in the hands of his disciples — Sharanananda, Atmananda, Hans Raj, Lajpat Rai and many other savants — who established Gurukulas, colleges, high schools, both for boys and girls all over India, in memory of Dayananda. These institutions followed the spirit of Dayananda where the institution of Brahmacharya was revived so as to live again the life lived by students in the ancient Indian Vedic times.

The popularity of the educational thought of Dayananda grew so much in the earlier decades of the 20th century and in the middle of the 20th century that a very large number of institutions were established where to a certain extent some of the ideals of education advocated by Dayananda had been put into practice. Heimsath, who had
visited a large number of such schools was "impressed by their approach to education, which can only be described as character-building, as well as by their academic qualifications. In 1947 the Samaj managed: 30 Gurukulas for boys; 10 Gurukulas for girls; 15 D.A.V. Colleges; 192 primary schools, 151 middle schools, and 200 high schools for boys; 700 primary schools and 10 high schools for girls; 142 night schools; and 322 schools for depressed classes".¹

The educational work done in Gurukulas and D.A.V. institutions shows the tremendous hold which the personality of Dayananda had on all who were associated with these institutions. Even without Dayananda's physical presence the educational reform movement smouldered for a long time, it shows the spell of his personality over his colleagues and followers working for the cause of education.

**Vivekananda (1863–1902)**

Vivekananda was a true prophet of the new Indian nationalism because his aim was to touch all Indians through love for them and spread afresh the religious message not yet known to them. The import of his whole life was to elevate the masses, his religion was not mysticism but a man-making religion and his God was not any metaphysical but a true reality that is Man. Vivekananda writes

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"Let all other vain gods disappear from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere, His Hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything...... The first of all worship is the worship of those all around us....... These are all our gods — men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our own countrymen".  

Vivekananda's message to Indians to rebel against the evils of their society and establish a new life based on human exemplified the unique character of the social reform movement of his time. The outstanding impression that he made on his followers was not his adherence to a classical Hindu school of thought but his reinterpretation of ancient wisdom in order to meet actively the need of contemporary Indian life. Vivekananda was widely travelled person, the western example of a society embodying certain religious or spiritual ideals in its secular life stimulated his undertaking a practical and a radical reform in India. He demanded to "go down to the basis of the things, to the very roots. That is what I call radical reformation. Put the fire there (at the level of the masses) and let it burn upwards and make an Indian nation." 

Vivekananda was not at all fussy about any particular 

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religion, though he was a Vedantist but his Vedanta was not limited to narrow boundaries. For the uplift of the masses Vivekananda was even ready to give up his religion. He writes "Leave to the next life the reading of the Vedanta, and the practice of meditation. Let this body which is here be put at the service of others.......The highest truth is this: God is present in all beings. They are His multiple forms. There is no other God to seek. He alone serves God who serves all other beings." Vivekananda in his every breath preached and worked for the betterment of Indians.

Before we discuss Vivekananda's educational thought it would be interesting to know about the life and philosophy of this "warrior and conqueror" as Romain Rolland called him.

Vivekananda, whose real name was Narendranath Datta, was born on January 12, 1863 in a wealthy Kayastha family in Calcutta. He studied in Duff college, where he was first interested in the rationalistic teachings of the Brahma Samaj and afterwards was impressed by the writings of Spencer, Mill, Hume, and Darwin; but after a detailed study of these writers he found no peace, his soul craved for something high and sublime. Towards the end of

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1. Romain Rolland, Prophets of the new India, quoted the speeches of Vivekananda on pp. 251-249-50.

2. Ibid. p. 292.
1881 he met Ramakrishana, a great yogi, at Dakshinesvar. As an atheist unhappy in his atheism, but full of hatred for the myths and superstitions with which he identified the religion. By a close contact with Ramakrishana, the mind of Narendra was gradually conformed and he became the most ardent disciple of Ramakrishana, under whose influence he became an adherent of the advita, non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta, which directs man's attention to the essential oneness of all things and the desirability of release from sensed experience through mukti or moksha. Narendra learnt from his guru that all religions have truth, the highest truth is Man and to serve Man is to serve God.

Upon the death of Ramakrishana in 1886, Narendra founded the Ramakrishna Order, a fraternity of monks and lived with his brother monks for several years. In 1890 he set out on a long pilgrimage in India and in 1893 he went to America to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. On the eve of departure he changed his name to Vivekananda. He toured America, England and Europe and spread the gospel of Ramakrishna and received material help for the Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad. He addressed the meetings as a representative of Hinduism and attended the attention of everyone by his magnificent presence, his gospel of the unity of all religions and his simple ethics of human service as the best worship of God.
During the three years which Vivekananda spent outside India he succeeded in gathering a large number of disciples and in founding Vedanta societies wherever he went.

After his return to India the effect of his Western experiences upon his thought became obvious. Before going abroad he held a feeling that his chief task was the regeneration but now after coming back he stressed the prime necessity of social and educational work.

In 1899 Vivekananda again visited America. The Vedanta Society of New York was now on a firm footing. Vivekananda founded many centres of the Vedanta society in California, Los Angeles and San Francisco. After lecturing in America, France and many countries of Europe he returned to India in December 1900. Due to no rest and strenuous work his health broke down. In India also rest was not ordained in his life and with over work he passed away on 4 July 1902 and in him India lost a great intellectual hero.

Vivekananda's hope for India's reformation rested on education for all, mostly secular, along with a massive spiritual rejuvenation. To him the panacea of all the social ills of Indian Society was found in the education of the masses. In a letter he wrote "Education, education, education alone. Through education, faith in one's own self, and through faith in one's own
self the inherent Brahman.\(^1\) can wake up in the people. Vivekananda was not satisfied with the education given in the schools of his times.

In his letter cited above he further wrote "The education that our boys receive is very negative".\(^2\) By negative education he meant that education which lacked in self knowledge, to him self knowledge was very essential because that knowledge only provided freedom from the bondage of worldly existence. Vivekananda understood that the education given in schools of his time provided only some means to get ordinary material prosperity for living an ordinary life like that of an animal. Education, according to Vivekananda, was required to provide "freedom, dispassion, renunciation" -- all these look very high ideals no doubt but show a way to very high ideals no doubt but show a way to get an education for fulness, not merely preparing for a life of an ordinary man but to live a life on a True religious man, a true artist or a true labourer, having a national character.

Comparing America's progress with India Vivekananda wrote: "I see it before my eyes a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the

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2. Ibid. p.336.
masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e., by spreading education among the masses."¹ To achieve this desired aim Vivekananda organized central colleges where some meek and simple but faithful young people were trained. In working for the cause of education Vivekananda had no trust in the so-called rich people because to him they were "more dead than alive",² to work for the education of the people.

Vivekananda set in motion a machinery which was composed of some young workers who were trained to bring noble ideas to the doors of everybody especially to the poor. These missionaries were trained in a central college under the supervision of Vivekananda and his other brother bonks. He did not recommend to force anything on others. He simply wanted that true knowledge of India as well as of other countries should be given to the masses. Vivekananda gave his intention, when he wrote "We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws".³ Vivekananda was a sworn enemy of all established truths, he proposed that education

¹. Ibid. p.335.
². Ibid. p.65.
³. Ibid. p.78.
was a means to lay before the masses all the ideals known
to the teacher, what masses liked best and which were most
fitted to them might be taken and preserved by them.

In the education of children Vivekananda vigorously
took up the cudgels against all dogmatic education, and
nobody had more strenuously defended the freedom of the
child. Vivekananda wished that the soul of the child
should be free from all bonds. He writes "I can never
teach you anything; you will have to teach yourself, but
I can help you perhaps in giving expression to that thought...
what right had my father to put all sorts of non sense into
my head?......or my master? ......You say they are good,
but they may not be my way. Think of the appalling evil
that is in the world today, of the million of millions of
innocent children perverted by the wrong ways of teaching.
How many beautiful spiritual truths have been nipped in the
bud by this horrible idea of a family religion, a social
religion, a national religion, and so forth. Think of what
a mass of superstition is in your heads just now about your
childhood's religion, or your country's religion, and what
an amount of evil it does or can do". ¹

Vivekananda's writings gave a very sound philosophi-
cal system of education. In that system a due place was

¹. Rolland, Romain: "Prophets of the New India", Book Two
'The Life of Vivekananda', p. 495.
given to the religion, character, child and the teacher. His system covered the scope for the education of the depressed classes, women, masses and all ranks and files of the whole society. Vivekananda established Maths (religious universities) both for men and women for giving full preparation for the progress of the world and the bettering its conditions.

Vivekananda had not written any treatise on education. His educational ideals are to be found scattered in his various speeches, letters and articles which are published in eight volumes under the title "complete works of Swami Vivekananda". He was a matchless educational and social reformer whose first duty, he thought, was towards his own people. "His universal soul was rooted in its human soil; and the smallest pang suffered by its inarticulate flesh sent a repercussion throughout the whole tree".1

Romain Rolland, the great French author and biographer of Vivekananda writes about the great saint and reformer that "It may justly be said that India's destiny was changed by him, and that his teaching re-echoed throughout humanity".2

1. Ibid. p. 570.
2. Ibid. p. 571.
SIR SYED AHMED KHAN (1817 - 1898)

The most effective work in modernisation in Indian education was done by Syed Ahmed Khan, who stands out prominently as a dynamic force fighting against conservatism and ignorance. In the development of modern India his role was singular and praiseworthy. Syed Ahmed was an educationist, theologian, scholar, social reformer, politician and a journalist.

Syed Ahmed was born in 1817 in Delhi in a distinguished and respectable family. He learnt Quran from his mother and privately learnt Persian, Arabic, Mathematics, Astrolabes and Tibr. His formal education ended when he was 18 or 19 years old.

He joined service as Naib Munshi in 1839 and after passing the Munsif examination he was appointed as Munsif in 1841 and promoted as Sadr Amin in 1855, Sadr-us-Sudur in 1858, judge of the small cause court in 1867 and he willingly retired in July 1876 for doing educational work.

The Mutiny of 1857 put a very remarkable effect on Syed Ahmed. It gave a new dimension to his personality and awakened his potentialities to work for the Muslim Community who was reduced to a very bad plight after Mutiny. We shall restrict ourselves to see only the educational efforts of Syed Ahmed and make a mention of him as an educationist.
Syed Ahmad's first achievement in the educational field was the establishment of a Persian Madrasa in 1859. In 1863 he established the Scientific Society and prepared a scheme for the translation of English works into Urdu. In 1864 Syed Ahmad established a Madrasa at Ghasipur. He formed several committees to look after the working of this institution. Provisions were made in the Madrasa for instruction in five languages -- English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit.

In 1864, when Syed Ahmad was transferred to Aligarh, he got an opportunity to give a definite shape to his future educational and cultural plans. In 1867 he presented a memorandum to the Viceroy in which he asked for the arrangement for higher learning through Indian languages, examination in Indian languages and establishment of a faculty of Urdu in Calcutta University or a separate Urdu University.

In 1869 Syed Ahmad visited England where he had ample opportunity of studying at first hand the social and educational institutions of the English people and felt more and more convinced that it is only by the assimilation of Western thought and culture that the Muslims could hope to recover anything like their former position in India. After his return in 1870 Syed Ahmad made a more vigorous propaganda for the spread of English education.
and Western culture among his people.

While in England, Syed Ahmad was convinced that it was education and only education which could serve as a panacea for all the social ills of the Muslims. When Vivekananda had gone abroad and had seen the advancement of the people of America, England and Europe, he was struck with the answer of his problem "why India was backward and poor?", and had found that the main cause of Indian ignorance was lack of education and Vivekananda had written to his brother-monks to launch a crusade for the education of masses. In the same way when Syed Ahmad saw the progress and advancement of the Britain in 1870, his national pride was deeply hurt and his mind began investigating the cause of his country's backwardness, he said in the same spirit as that of Vivekananda "Until the education of the masses is pushed on as it is here (in England) it is impossible for a nation to become civilised and honoured". In elaborating his point further Syed Ahmad said "The cause of England's civilisation is that all the arts and sciences are in the language of the country. Those who are really bent upon improving and bettering India must remember that the only way of compassing this is by having the whole of arts and sciences translated into their own language. I should like

to have this written in gigantic letters on the Himalayas, for the remembrance of future generations."  

In England Syed Ahmed visited Oxford and Cambridge Universities and conceived the idea of establishing an educational institution for Muslims in India on the lines of those universities. The result was the school at Aligarh which Syed Ahmed founded in 1875, which was raised to the status of a college, the foundation stone of which was laid by Lord Lytton on January 8, 1877. This College provided for liberal education in arts and sciences through the medium of English language. It was a residential institution and helped a great deal in developing the mental outlook and personality of the young Muslim students on progressive lines.

Syed Ahmad wished, as he wrote in a letter to Salar Jung, to bring up the students in this college "to the same standard of learning as is attained by the students of the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the only distinction being that instead of the Christian, Smith taught in the English universities, the Muhammadan faith would be taught here".  

In 1886, Syed Ahmad established the Muhammadan Educational Conference because he thought that a single College

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1. Ibid. p.63.
2. Ibid.p.85. the latter quoted from 'Aligarh Documents', p.172.
could not serve the educational needs of the entire Muslim population of India. He wanted to create necessary atmosphere for organising a movement for an extended educational activity. The objects of this conference were to promote Western education among the Muslims to make proper arrangements for religious instructions in the institutions of the Muslims, to encourage the education of Oriental subjects and theology, and to improve and raise the standard of old Indian maktabas.

The educational programme of Syed Ahmad was criticized by some Muslims who were more religious-minded than Syed Ahmad and looked askance at the modernisation of education and Europeanisation of the Muslim Society. The main reasons for this opposition were apparently not so much ideological as personal and were not weighty enough to appeal to the rank and file of the Muslim community.

When Annie Besant arrived in India in 1893 and travelled for her lecture tours, for the first time, she heard about the educational works of Dayananda, Vivekananda and Syed Ahmad Khan. Annie Besant was neither impressed by Dayananda's line of action and nor by Syed Ahmad's educational programme, one seemed to Annie Besant solely for the Hindu regeneration and the other entirely based on a programme for Muslim advancement. Annie Besant
wanted a viamedia between the two. For her design for adoption she desired such an example, of that precursor, which may suit to her Theosophical bent of mind. It was Vivekananda and his religious wideness which suited most to Annie Besant. Before coming to India Annie Besant had met Vivekananda in September 1893 in the Parliament of Religions, Chicago and had attended, also, his most of the public lectures there.

The two great religions, which have largely influenced the growth and development of the philosophy of Theosophy, are Hinduism and Buddhism. The whole terminology and theology of Theosophy has been derived from these two religions. The other religions have contributed very little, rather negligible, in the enrichment of Theosophy. Vivekananda’s religious broadness, due to his adhesion to advita vedanta, was liked by Annie Besant, she tried to copy Vivekananda and appreciated when he said "we are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called Man. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree? There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual, to know that I and my brother are one.... Let us work without desire for name or fame or rule over the others. Let us be free from the triple bonds of lust, greed of gain and anger. All the truth is with us".¹

¹. Vivekananda: Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p.223, a letter to an Englishman.
Annie Besant also liked the work of Vivekananda for the masses of India, based on his humanistic philosophical ideologies. Annie Besant, in her educational pursuits, advocated a system of education which tallied mostly with the system of education of Vivekananda. Because of the similarity in the ideologies of Annie Besant and Vivekanand, she off and on invited Vivekananda to lecture\(^1\) in the Theosophical Society so as to understand his viewpoints, on various issues of philosophy, religion and education, in a clear manner. In the central Hindu College Benares and other educational institutions established by Annie Besant in India the influence of Vivekananda's educational ideas was very clearly visible.

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\(^1\) Vivekananda; Letters of Swami Vivekananda, in a letter written on 8th August,1896 from Switzerland Vivekananda wrote "Mrs. Annie Besant invited me to speak at her Lodge, on Bhakti". p.299.