CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHICAL BASES OF ANNIE BESANT'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Annie Besant was primarily a philosopher. She had tried to develop her philosophical thought on the basis of her thorough study of different religious, both in England and in India. While in England, before her adhesion to Theosophy, when Annie Besant was hardly 26 years old, she was compelled to become a free-thinker atheist, because her discussions, concerning her religious doubts about Christianity, with Edward Pusey, Voysey, Charles Vaughan and Arthur Stanley — the great custodians of Christianity in England in her times — about the nature and existence of God, belief in Christ as God, evolution of a soul and other allied problems, could not give a satisfactory answer to her religious queries and thus it resulted in her denouncing Christianity.

After joining Theosophy in 1889, a vast field of philosophy was flung open before Annie Besant. Theosophy being so vast a subject, embracing the whole of human life at once, covering the fields of philosophy, science and religion; led Annie Besant into metaphysics. She found a
new approach to all the realities, which were hidden from
her before.

Theosophy attracted Annie Besant because it gave most
satisfactory answers to her doubts. The three objects of
Theosophy, which encouraged Annie Besant, to join Theosophy
were: To found a Universal Brotherhood without distinction
of race or creed; to forward the study of Aryan literature
and philosophy; to investigate unexplained laws of nature
and the physical powers latent in man.¹ In Theosophy
Annie Besant found a great possibility to know what was
knowable and was unknown to her.

Theosophy was called "the science of comparative
mythology" because it was based upon a number of facts that
it was impossible to deny. The facts were gathered together
one after another, from different cultures, ancient beliefs,
religious books of the past and the teachings of the great
seers and saints. To Annie Besant, Theosophy was the back-
bone of every great religion. She writes "On matters of
religious opinions the members (of Theosophical Society)
are absolutely free. The founders of the society deny a
personal God, and a somewhat subtle form of Pantheism is
taught as the Theosophic view of the universe though even
this is not forced on the members of the Society. I have
no desire to hide the fact that this form of Pantheism

appears to me to promise solution of some problems. . . . .
which atheism leaves untouched”. 1

After coming to India as a Theosophist Annie Besant studied, in details, all the chief seven religions of India—Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism and Sikhism— and thus the traditional sealed secrets of religious beliefs and truths were thrown open to her knowledge and had overpowered her philosophical thought. Annie Besant had a reverence for all religions. She wanted to found the fundamental unity of all religions and her policy of work was “instead of bending our efforts to convert our neighbours to our own faith, we should do well to search out and bring forth the spiritual treasures it contains, often hidden under a mass of intellectual verbiage that repels the non-institutional. A true brotherhood of religions can only be secured by members of each recognizing and honouring the truths contained in other faiths, and being willing to live in amity” with each other.

Annie Besant delivered, on the twenty-first anniversary of the Theosophical Society at Adyar in December 1896, four lectures on four great religions—Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity. On the twenty sixth anniversary of the Theosophical Society in 1901, she deli-

1. Ibid. pp.452-53.
vered four lectures on religions -- Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and Theosophy. By these lectures Annie Besant aimed at making a religious unity in India, she writes "If it may be that here one nation shall be builded of many faiths; if the Musalman can love the Hindu and the Hindu love the Musalman; if the Christian can clasp hands with the Parsi and the Parsi with the Christian; if the Jaina and the Buddhist and the Sikh can love each other as brethren and not hate each other as rivals; then shall be the triumph of religion, and then alone shall the name of God become a name of peace".  

A detailed study of comparative religions in the light of Theosophy helped Annie Besant in developing a solid philosophical system. She writes "I believe in an Inner Government of our own world, the Occult Hierarchy, composed of the company of Just Men made perfect, the Rishis of the Hindus and Buddhists, the Saints of the Christians, the great Prophets of the Hebrews and Muslims, who are within the reach of men, who, assisted by a great host of Devas, Archangels, Angels and Nature spirits, guide and help upward sub-human and human evolution from the simple to the complex, from nescience to knowledge, from imperfection to relative perfection, within the inviolable laws of Nature,

which express the conditions of the manifestation of the Universal Life through the Great Architect of our universe.\(^1\) Annie Besant gained this religious faith after a copious study of all the basic religions of the world. Her philosophical attitudes were not of unquestioning acceptance but she tested, even a slightest philosophical idea, which crept up in her mind, on the touchstone of her genuine reasoning. Thus Annie Besant's philosophical bases had compelled her to participate in some practical side, especially in education.

In order to understand the philosophical bases of Annie Besant's educational thought, it would be useful to study her philosophy under the following heads:

1. Annie Besant's faith in the Hindu Metaphysical concepts, and in the
2. Ethical concepts.

1. **Faith in the Hindu Metaphysical Concepts**:

Though Annie Besant had a great reverence for all the religions but she was drawn more devotedly towards Hinduism, it would be of great interest to note that Annie Besant had adopted Hinduism. Annie Besant had a

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1. In 1926, Annie Besant published a book on India under the title "India: Bond or Free". The original manuscript had a foreward which was omitted when the book finally appeared. That foreward states very briefly the "Faith" of Annie Besant, quoted in the 'Theosophist' of October 1947 being Besant Centenary Issue, Vol.69, No.1., p.21.
firm faith in Hindu Metaphysics. To her, Theosophy had a
great lesson for Hinduism, as she writes "As Theosophy
spreads, Hinduism revives, because it receives a current of
the divine Ancient Wisdom which vivifies its forms and makes
its reality felt".¹

Before her arrival in India, she had learnt Sanskrit
and had become a well-versed Sanskrit scholar. Her thorough
study of cardinal religious books of Hinduism intensified
her self-introspection. When she came to India in 1893
her religious introspection deepened. She discussed her
religious queries about Hinduism with Hindu scholars and
Sanskritists like Bhawan Dass and Gangadhara Shastri. From
now on Annie Besant undertook a deep study of Bhagavad-
Gita and it became a constant companion of her life. She
translated Gita from original Sanskrit into English, wrote
hints on its study and also studied the original books on
Hindu religion. Annie Besant lectured incessantly before
vast audience on the Gita, on the Upanishads, on the hidden
wisdom of the Puranas, the Bhagavata, the Mahayana and
Mahabharata.

Writing about Annie Besant’s love for Hindu thought
and culture, Muthulakshmi says "Dr. Annie Besant was the
prime factor who influenced men and women of other lands

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.¹

Thus Annie Besant's thorough understanding of Hindu religion and culture enabled her to construct a system of Hindu philosophy which she applied in solving the educational and social problems of the Indian society. To Annie Besant a true philosophy was "an answer satisfactory to the reason to all the great problems of life......To see the One under endless forms, to realise the unity amid infinite diversity, and so to satisfy the reason"² were the chief functions of philosophy.

Here we shall try to analyse her philosophy in order to see how Annie Besant, through her facile pen and magnetic eloquence, managed to explain and interpret some Hindu metaphysical concepts.

(A) The Self:

Annie Besant used the word 'the Self' for "all-pervading, all-irradiating, all-vivifying, all-sustaining Life of God.......All that there was of love and of beauty were but the scattered reflections of the one Self".³ To her Self is Brahman who plans the world, with all its beauty,

². Annie Besant: 'Mysticism', p.43.
its happiness and sufferings, its joys and pains, in order that His powers may be shown forth in manifestation. Annie Besant says "from the fire-mist to the LOGOS, all exist for the sake of Self". ¹ This quotation clarifies the meaning of the Self, according to Annie Besant, as in her views all the existence in the world is the fragment of the One Self embodied in countless forms, realizing their own identity and manifesting the powers of the Self through the garment of matter around them.

Considering the Self, Annie Besant receives enough support from the quotation from the Bhagavat Gita where Shri Krishana says "Mamam'ah — My portion — "a portion of My Self" are all these living objects, these Jivatmas".²

To Annie Besant "The Self of the Universe and the Self of man are one, and in knowing the Self we know That which is at the root of the universe and of man alike".³ She considers that One Self is in every separated body.

To her, every thing is dear, for the sake of Self "not for the outer shape but for the inner Self — the lowest as well as the highest, the speck of dirt as well as the loftiest Deva".⁴ She considers the Self as the synonym of Brahman, which is in all, pervades all. "It is the Self

¹. Annie Besant: 'Dharma', p.25.
of all, and exists in all, and is all.\textsuperscript{1}

In Annie Besant's system of philosophy the Self of man is that what sometimes we call Atma and we also come across the Self of all, which is Parmatma a higher Self. Though these selves seem separate but are all fragments of the One Self, and therefore destined to perfection. In Gita Sri Krishna says "I established this universe with a fragment of myself and I remain"\textsuperscript{2} a fragment of that Supreme is the Self, the real Self of a man.

As the Self is One, the variety seen in the world is of the outer universe which is the play of illusions or the veil of Maya. This outer appearance binds us to the Unity which is the only life, the only Lord of the Universe, beyond whom there is nothing; and He is One.

To Annie Besant the Self is actionless. Activity is of Prakrti, the veil with which the Self surrounds Himself, the play of gunas. Annie Besant writes "The variety and activity in Nature are the outer semblances, the visible appearances, of that maturity and death, the wheel of constant change in living objects, these are the play of the gunas, and the gunas revolve, whilst the Self remains unchanged. .......The forms are changing and therefore illusory; the life is Himself and He is all".\textsuperscript{3} In Bhagavad Gita

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid. p.14.
\textsuperscript{2} The Bhagavad Gita, X,42.
\textsuperscript{3} Annie Besant: 'The Three Path to Union with God', p.36.
Lord Krishna says "He who seeth that matter verily performeth all actions, and that the Self is actionless, he seeth". 

Annie Besant is firm in her belief that the Self is actionless. His apparent movements belong to external Nature. The Self is everywhere seated in all and beyond all.

Three-fold aspects of the Self:

The Self in man, being in the image of God, in triple as the Self, the Divine, is triple. Annie Besant elaborates this point with the help of the Hindu philosophy where Brahman is three fold, who is Sat-Chit-Ananda or Kirya-Jnanam-Ichchha. The human reflection of that triple Divine Self is the triple Self in man. Three-fold aspects are explained under:

(i) The first aspect brought into activity for the building of the universe is Sat, life, existence, Kirya activity, the active creative power. In man this power awakens intelligence and becomes active. This activity is the reflection of Brahma, which is known as the Universal Mind, in Hindu philosophy, which is the creative energy from which all are born, brings forth imaginative power in man.

(ii) The second aspect is Chit or Jnanam, which is

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later evolved in man. This aspect helps in the recognition of unity rather than diversity. The effect of Chit playing upon Sat in man is the intelligence that separates, divides and analyses the multiple forms and their inter-relations. Chit is the wisdom that realises the unity of all things and that accomplishes union.

(iii) Third and highest aspect of the Self is Will, Ichchha, or Ananda, the first Bliss, the unity that lies beyond union, and this can be developed in man only because man is one with the Eternal in his nature.

Sheaths of the Self:

Annie Besant explains five sheaths of the Self in her system of philosophy. These are:

(i) Sheath of food-body; the annamayakosha: This sheath is the sheath of food-body. But the body that I use and I wear "is not me", The body that I use has certain purposes and it is 'I' who use it. Annie Besant explains double activity in this sheath of ours that we call our body. Firstly it has the activity of the atoms and the molecules and the cells of the body. "It is not Atma's activity in the sheaths as the Self of the sheath, but Atma's activity in the constituent particles as the Self of the particles which is necessary for their existence".1

Secondly, there is an 'I' as well as a sheath, and the 'I' uses this sheath for its own purpose. Annie Besant, while elaborating this point says "'I' in me wants to write......My hand holds the pen and dips it into the ink and traces it on the paper. When this sheath of mine was very young and was training for my use, it was taught to write, and one part of the sheath learned to take the pen in a particular way, to hold it in a particular way; and always when 'I' wanted to write it was to do this duty, without which the minds, the 'I' could not write on the material plane......note this: that when it has once learned it, it continued to do it in the same way, and if I want to change the way of writing......I have got to take a lot of trouble to change the automatic activity of the cells of the sheath".¹

The food-body sheath supplies the nervous centres on which the second sheath, the sheath of prana acts directly as the co-ordinating and controlling energy which fashions it for the purposes which the higher intelligence demands.

(ii) The Sheath of Prana, the pranamayakoaha:

The prana is the outgoing energy of Atma which is the life. Shankara tells us that this prana is Kriyashakti, the energy of doing, so the sheath of prana is the sheath

¹. Ibid. p.40.
of activity. This subtle sheath in which Atma as prana is working, and it controls and holds together the whole of the lower matter as sheath. There could be no sheath of food, no physical body, if it were not for prana, which co-ordinates all the separate cells and makes them into one orderly whole. It is interesting to note that prana is only Atma in activity, Atma in itself cannot work. Atma is Sat, immovable, unchangeable. The outgoing energy is prana and from Atma prana is born.1

(iii) The Sheath of Collections, the manomayakosha:

The material which go to build the manomayakosha in man has been evolved in the animal Kingdom, and these materials carry on the results of their evolution, and are therefore available for the building of man.

The response to pleasure and pain evolved in the animals is carried to the man. In order that man might be built, it becomes necessary that the materials of the sheath should be ready to be co-ordinated together. The manomayakosha plays double actions, it is in truth the organ of thinking, but is also pervaded by the senses; that is, this double action going on in it always, the receipt from without and the elaboration from within. This

1. Prashnopanishat, iii,3.
This is why this sheath is so difficult to understand. This is why knowledge is necessary if the Self would become free and know Itself as Itself alone.

(iv) The Sheath of discrimination, the vijnanamayakosha:

The vijnanamayakosha is the sheath of the Self by which the lower sheaths are to be mastered. Into this sheath experiences are reflected from the manomayakosha as ideal concepts. Manomayakosha is the collector and elaborator, the vijnanamayakosha is to arrange and discriminate, to have the whole of this elaborated collection as the material to work on, the whole of this as material by which it is going to gain higher consciousness and a more perfect cognition of the individual Self. The special work in this sheath is the work of abstract reasoning, dealing with pure ideas, separated from the concrete presentations.

(v) The Sheath of Bliss, the anandamayakosha:

In Mundakopanishat it is written "He, all-wise, all-knowing glorious in the world, in the divine town of Brahman, placed in the ether, standeth Atma, of the nature of mind, ruler of Prana, of the body, of food. Concentrated in the heart, by the knowledge of That, the wise behold the Radiant, whose body is bliss, immortal".\(^1\) The anandamayakosha is

\(^1\) Mundakopanishat, ii,II,p.7.
there, where the Atma knows itself and its nature is bliss.
Writing about the anandamayakosha, Annie Besant says, "It is Brahman. It is the Logos of the Soul. It is the Atma conscious of itself". ¹

The Working of the Sheaths:

The sheaths of the Self solve so many of the problems, which puzzle us everyday. Firstly, these sheaths present to us a number of illusory 'I's' apparently conscious entities, and when we look inward, we find a psychological struggle and a mental confusion going on, as though we consisted of many 'I's' instead of one. With the help of self-consciousness we can understand we can understand the causes of the real mental conflicts. Explaining the working of the sheaths philosophically in solving the mental conflicts Annie Besant says "For instance looking from without, I see the body which is at work, and then I trace the activity of prana, and then I see the passions carrying a man away, and then see the mind interfering and pulling him back again, studying like that from without I see all these different things warring the one against the other........when they all are subordinated to the One Life and when everything comes from within. There is the end of strife". ²

¹ Annie Besant: The Self and Its Sheaths, p.83.
² Ibid. pp.86-91.
Secondly, the sheaths of the desire and the emotions which clothes the self can be conquered by the mind only. Training in meditation is the right path to over-power the desire and emotions. Annie Besant writes, "Turn the mind to meditation......listen to the voice of the mind, and use the mind to control the senses and to turn them to the really desirable, to that which is lasting instead of fleeting.....when the senses are silenced... then hand over the mind to the intellect, the lower to the higher man when once you have seen and realized the Self, then the desires and the mind will be silent".1

Thirdly, the sheaths play a very important role as they help us to learn sympathy. Annie Besant writes "sympathy is only perfect when pain is felt in the sheath, vibrating to every throb of agony from the outside world, but when the Self knows Itself as separate from the sheath and realizes the pain, feels it in the sheath, but is not disturbed in Itself by the vibration that is agonising the sheath in which It is clothed".2 Annie Besant thinks it possible to feel pain with the uttermost anguish. It is also possible that the manomayakoña shall be full of pain and every fibre strained to almost the breaking point, and yet that the Self within, knowing the pain and

feeling it by reflection is yet absolutely still, calm and unshaken. No pain touches it, though the pain is felt in the sheath, and it can act with perfect steadiness and absolutely at human service. There is the triumph in man.

The Realisation of the Self:

Annie Besant gives two ways towards the attainment of the Universal Self. The first is the way of the intellect, which deals with the metaphysics, which gradually lifts a man out of superstition, out of narrowness and out of ignorance, and carries him as far as human intellect can go.

The second path of the realisation of the Self is the path of the conquerred senses and mind when, in the words of Annie Besant "the quietude of the senses and the tranquility of the mind the man beholds the glory of the Self".\(^1\) Annie Besant believed that by the intellect we can reach the highest philosophy but it is only through the conquest of lower nature that we can breathe the same air in which the higher Self lives. The intellect and even devotion cannot help in the Self realisation. It is only by sinking into the depths of our own being, by searching within, the supreme Self can be realized, and

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there only shall we realize that we are One with the Self Universal.

(B)  G O D

Annie Besant believes that "there is no religion higher than Truth". To her God or Truth are the same. She is quite conscious of the unnumerable definitions of God because His manifestations are innumerable. "That which is behind all forms of life is Himself the Life, the consciousness, the Power. All forms are but an expression of part of His existence, and beyond and above all forms He Himself, in his infinite being, remains".¹

Consistently with Hinduism Annie Besant does not mind calling her religion pantheistic as in it "everything embodies the life of God, there is nothing existing that does not share in His Beauty, in His strength, and in His life"² she does not believe in any personal God, to her God is an all-embracing spirit. God or truth, Annie Besant considers, is not only in us but also out of us.

Annie Besant never considers that God, Universe and Man are isolated from each other. Her philosophy presents an integrated picture of God, Universe and Man. She writes, "Our Self is one, not multiple, albeit His overflowing life expresses itself in multitudinous ways".³

1. Annie Besant: "Mysticism", in her lecture 'God Idea' she states the quotation as stated, p.42.
2. Ibid. p.44.
For understanding Annie Besant's views on God, we shall study God under following heads:

1. **Proofs for the existence of God**
2. **Nature of God**
3. **Quality in relation to God**
4. **The Manifestation of God**

1. **Proofs for the existence of God:** In the philosophy of Annie Besant, God is regarded as one reality, one life, which is the all enveloping power, outside which nothing can exist. In her beautiful artistic style Annie Besant says about God, "He is self-existent, Infinite and Eternal, the One life on which all lives depend, the One Existence from which all Existences are drawn; "My name is He who hath shaped everything". Everything that exists is in Him; "In Him we live and move and have our being". He has been compared to an ocean, whose billows are universes, whose spray is myriad forms; to a Fire, whence millions of sparks proceed, and every spark a spirit; to a Tree, bearing innumerable leaves, and every leaf a life. He is vaster than space, and in him move the uncounted myriads of stars, each one the centre of a system. He is minuter than an atom, for He is within every atom as its indwelling life. There is nothing so huge that it can over-stretch Him, there is nothing so near-seen or tiny that it can escape Him. "He hath no form nor colour, nor outline",
but all forms draw their beauty from Him, all colours are portions of His White light, all outlines are expressions of His thought.1

Annie Besant does not give any of the traditional proofs for God’s existence. She regards personal experience to be the only proof as far as God is concerned. In her book 'An Introduction to Yoga', Annie Besant says "you cannot demonstrate God by any arguments or reasoning; He is above and beyond reasoning, and although the reason may guide you on the way, it will not prove to demonstrate that God is. The only way you can know Him is by diving into yourself. There you will find Him, and know that He is without as well as within you."2

But the idea of God can be made more concrete if we point out some considerations which make His existence undeniable. Davidson writes, "The three old-fashioned theistic proofs (ontological, cosmological and theological) have their use, but it is not that of a logical proof of Divine existence. They are all attempts, each in its own way, to fill in with content the conception of God where existence is already presupposed."3

Annie Besant approves of Davidson’s view point. She recognizes God everywhere. She finds Him "in the

stability of mountains, in the crashing billows, in the
rush of whirling vinds......in the star-strewn depths of
space, in the wide stretchings of deserts ......in the
colours of flower-spangled meadows, in the rippling laugh-
ter of brooklets, in the green depths of forest shades, in
the gleaming expanse of snowy mountain peaks, in the wav-
ing of the golden corn, in the sunshine, in the silver of
wavelets in the moonlight". 1

Annis Besant has a firm belief that "there is no
definite proof of God save the witness of the Self within
to His existence, and his idea of finding the proof of
God is that you should strip away from your consciousness
all limitations, and thus reach the stage where you have
pure consciousness — save a veil of the thin nirvanic
matter. Then you know that God is". 2

At some places Annie Besant tries to prove the exis-
tence of God by the use of the old argument from "design"
She writes "He is the Shaper, Builder, Architect of His
worlds, and His life alone gives birth to them, preserves
them during their term of existence and recalls them out
of their separation into His Unity when that term is over". 3

To Annie Besant, God manifests Himself for three
divine functions:—

(i) **The Creation of the Universe**: His work is of bringing a Universe into being, of gifting it with a share in His Existence, of vesting in it a portion of His Existence.

(ii) **The Preservation of the Universe**: He alone sustains and preserves the worlds, and

(iii) **The Destruction of the Universe**: When the period of rest arrives, He alone dissolves the world.

To Annie Besant, God "takes the designation of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, accordingly as He creates, preserves and destroys......He is the Father of our Spirits, the Protector of our lives, the Source of our activities".\(^1\)

It must be remembered that Annie Besant does not attach much importance to any proofs of the God's existence. What really she feels important is the nature of God and his relation to the universe and man.

**Nature of God**

Annie Besant did not believe in the Personality of God in her early years, even before joining Charles Bradlaugh in his free-thought pursuits, she had given up the use of prayer, Annie Besant writes, "not because I was an Atheist but because I was still a Theist: It seemed to me to be

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1. Ibid. pp.34-35.
absured to pray, if I believed in a God who was wiser and better than myself. An all-wise God did not need my suggestions: an all-good God would do all that was best without my prompting. Prayer appeared to me to be a blasphemous impertinence and for a considerable time I had discontinued its use. But God fades gradually out of the daily life of those who never pray; an 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.¹

After joining the Theosophical Society Annie Besant followed the foot-steps of both Colonel Olcott and H.P. Blavatsky and accepted the personality of God. Her inclinations were philosophical and religious for which the acceptance of personality is necessary. She believed that Ishvara of Sankara was of Mayic series and is unable to satisfy the religious and philosophical hunger of mankind. Like a Vaishanava Vedantist Annie Besant accepts a God who is "all-inclusive". Moreover she believes in the possibility of personal relation between God and man. "The presence of evil and pain in the world made by a good God" does not favour the opinion of Annie Besant about God.

¹ Annie Besant: 'The Autobiographical Sketches', p.87.
to be considered useful for the religious of the world. That is the reason that Annie Besant does not approve of the God who brings sufferings and difficulties. She writes "I hated the God who required the death sacrificed at his hands".  

The concept of Personality of God is a very recent idea and we shall see later, how Annie Besant develops her idea of personality, while explaining her ethical and aesthetic outlook. Here it is quite sufficient to say that Annie Besant's personality of God was a clear advance from Buddhistic rationalism and ethicism of the imaginative Hinduism of the Upanishads and Puranas. Indeed Annie Besant tries to go still further. She even more or less openly allies herself to the so-called idolatory of popular Hinduism. She does not condemn idolatory but emphasises the teachings of the Upanishads. She is known as a defender of Puranic Hinduism. Annie Besant quotes many passages from the Upanishads to show that they do not exclude the idea of a personal God.

It is significant that we rarely find the word "Absolute" in the writings of Annie Besant. She often speaks of God as "Self", "Brahman", "Spirit", etc., she attributes personality to God, not for bringing him down

1. Ibid. p.52.
to the stature of man but of proclaiming him to be the root of the highest and best that mankind strives for but never attains. Annie Besant’s God is infinite and His Personality does not limit Him in any way. She writes "He is greater than all universes".¹

Quality in Relation to Brahman:

Here we shall consider the attitudes of Annie Besant towards the question of the applicability of Quality to the Brahman. In the Indian philosophy the controversy about Saguna (possessed of qualities) Brahman and Nirguna (devoid of qualities) Brahman is very typical. Strictly speaking there is no transition from Nirguna Brahman to Saguna Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is unchangeable. It does not undergo the least change and cannot get transformed into Brahman with attributes.

But in the system of Annie Besant "The embodied Self of the Nirguna Brahman is the Saguna Brahman" and both these qualities have a close affinity with each other. She quotes Upanishads and says, "From non-existence came forth existence".² For her the single syllable, the Pranava means the Nirguna Brahman. But the same syllable spoken as a triplicity means the Saguna Brahman. She writes where the one is without attributes,

the triple is spoken of as Sat, Chit, Ananda, Existence, Consciousness, Bliss. The First Being is the Saguna Brahman....the One syllable, the Nirguna; the same word with a difference, three syllables, the Saguna; and that may guide you to some little glimpse of the mystery before us: how the One becomes the Three, the same and yet, by the presence of the manifested qualities, different.¹

Annie Besant suggests that the One Reality, "the partless Aum, the One syllable is the partless Brahman, the Nirguna Brahman" and "the letters taken separately, the A, the U, the M are no longer one syllable, but three.... there are the three stages of consciousness".², the Saguna Brahman.

There are many meanings for these three letters -- the A, the U and the M -- for wherever a trinity is found these letters may symbolise its parts. Annie Besant explains these letters according to the Upanishads. She says that "these three letters may be taken as symbolising Ishvara Himself, His Maya and His relation to His work".³

Annie Besant's these letters, as three type of consciousness, can be explained as follows:

(1) "A", Vaishvanara, the waking consciousness, which is also called Vital Self or Vital Soul or Pranatma. It

1. Ibid. p.25.
2. Ibid. p.12.
3. Ibid. p.12.
is known as Personal Self that which exists whenever there is consciousness embodied in physical matter.

(ii) "U", Taitasa, the super-waking consciousness. It is called "the dream-consciousness" in the western psychology. But the 'Svapna' of the Eastern Psychology is not the equivalent of the dream-consciousness. There is no one English word which expresses its meaning. By 'Svapna' Annie Besant means a state higher and more real than the waking consciousness. To Annie Besant 'Svapna' is higher and more real state than the waking state as it exists in all subtle worlds -- in the individual Self, the Jivatma, the Monad.

(iii) "M", the God World, which is revealed in its utmost splendour in the highest world of all, where Ishvara Himself unfolds His powers, that is the Prajna; He is all-knowing, perfect in knowledge, Ishvara, the Ruler, the Director, the all-sustainer, the Supreme, the Pratyogatma, the Avtaratma of all, the Saguna Brahman.

To Annie Besant the word AUM represents in its three letters everything which exists. In these letters we find, in the words of Annie Besant, "the three-fold Brahman as manifest, the One as unmanifest; when pronounced as a triplicity, it means the three-fold manifested Brahman (the Saguna Brahman) and when pronounced as a unit it means the Nirguna Brahman."

1. Ibid. p.15.
The Manifestations of God:

In the philosophical system of Annie Besant God's many manifestations have been explained, she thinks of Him as "the thousand-handed God", who is making the world better, more righteous, more loving and more beautiful every moment. She considers God to be the origin of all manifestations. Her theosophical outlook regards God as Creator and the universe as a creation in time and space. She has a faith in the exoteric depths of a religion where God is regarded as separate from His creation, as a workman is separate from the object He makes, and has a belief in the extra-Kosmic God of esoteric religion where God has no separation from His work, concerning this view of creation and relationship of God to His manifestations we shall explain Annie Besant's views to the following manifestations of God:-

(1) The Manifestation of God in Nature
(ii) The Manifestation of God in the Unseen.
(iii) The Manifestation of God in Man.


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and all speech, a LOGOS, by imposing on Himself a limit, circumscribing voluntarily the range of His own Being, becomes the manifested God, and tracing the limiting sphere of His activity thus outlines the area of His universe within that sphere the universe is born, is evolved and dies; it lives, it moves, it has its being in Him; its matter is His emanation; its forces and energies are currents of His life; He is immanent in every atom, all-pervading, all-sustaining, all-evolving, He is its source and its end, its cause and its object; its centre and circumference; it is built on Him as its sure foundation, it breathes in Him as its encircling space, He is in everything and everything in Him."\(^1\)

Annie Besant’s God is immanent. In her book 'The Immediate Future', Annie Besant writes: "It is that in everything that lives, in a universe where all is living; there the universal Life that is God is present, supporting and maintaining...... and there is nothing in the whole of the mighty universe, imaging in its great immensity all that infinity of which it is an image, however imperfect; in all the systems of worlds, in suns unnumbered, in space that knows no ending, in lives that know no numbering, nothing from the very lowest grain of dust to the very LOGOS

\(^1\) Annie Besant: 'The Ancient Wisdom', p.45.
of a system that can exist bereft of the Life which is
the root, the support of all".  

Annie Besant is definite "to realise the presence
of God behind the material phenomenon", She writes, "Not
a fire that burns upon earth, whether the fire of the
Volcanic mountain, whether the fire ranging through the
vast forest......that is.......the presence of the God".  

(ii) The Manifestation of God in the Unseen: To
Annie Besant the divine life has immense variety of forms
and all these forms are not confined only to this world.
She considers this world to be a mere speck of illimitable
space. She thinks it "unreasonable to suppose that the
divine life manifests only in the physical matter on our
one small world".  

She is confident that there are count-
less inhabited worlds and the huge realms of space are
composed of matter too subtle for our vision, are all-
thronged with beings sharing in the inexhaustible Life
of God.

Annie Besant writes, "All religions have recognized
the existence of superhuman Intelligence, and have called
them by various names. The Hindu and the Buddhist speak
of them as Devas, Shining Ones; the Hebrew, the Christian
and the Musulman name them Archangels and Angels, the
Zoroastrian calls them the seven Ameahaspandas (Archangels)

with their hosts of subordinate ministers, including the Parohars. Most of the religions also recognize the existence of inferior Intelligences.....many sensitive persons feel the presence of conscious life in scenes of natural beauty, and many are able to see these lesser children of nature sporting in the woods, the streams, the air; they are called nature spirits, elementals, fairies, genii, jinns, etc".1

In her book 'Esoteric Christianity' Annie Besant explains this thesis more elaborately when she says, "stretching between the Trinity and humanity are many grades and hierarchies of invisible beings;.......they are found in all regions, and they ensoul the energies of Nature. From the standpoint of Occultism there is no dead force and no dead matter. Force and matter alike are living and active, and an energy or a group of energies is the veil of an Intelligence, of a consciousness, who has that energy as his outer expression, and the matter in which that energy moves yields a form which he guides or ensouls....Without these angelic Lives, these countless invisible Intelligence, these consciousness which ensoul the force and matter which is Nature, Nature herself would not only remain unintelligible, but she

would be out of relation alike to the Divine Life that
moves within and around her, and to the human lives that
are developing in her midst. These innumerable Angels
link the worlds together. 1

(iii) The Manifestation of God in Man: Annie Besant
finds God in man as 'the crown of creation'. She believes
that "the final image of the Supreme on earth is man; in
man alone is the highest life; the others are climbing
towards it, but in them it has not yet evolved". 2 Annie
Besant is confident that God dwells within all and there
is only One Self within which we all are rooted. She
writes, "The recognition of the One Self dwelling equally
in all is the one sure foundation of Brotherhood.....To
live it even to even to a small extent, cleanses the heart
and purifies the vision; to live it perfectly would be to
eradicate all stain of separateness and to let the pure
shining of the self irradiate us, as light through flaw-
less glass". 3

Annie Besant further writes, "Every one of us, if
we only think of it, each one is at work to carve his own
life into a perfect image, the image of the Divine manifest
in man. It is not that the Divine is not within you; were

1. Annie Besant: "Evolution of Esoteric Christianity", pp.285-
it not so, how should you bring it forth? The ideal comes before the manifestation, the thought creates the form, and in every one of you there is sleeping, as it were, the Divine image, and your work is to make that image manifest, and then you are the spiritual man......wherever you may be, in whatever workshop of this great world you may find yourself at labour, keep ever in your heart the ideal that you fain would realize. Feel the presence of the imprisoned Divinity that you have the mighty privilege, and you alone, of liberating; and take in hand your tools, cut away the worthless stone, liberate the splendid statue and then you shall know yourself self-consciously as that which you really are, man in the image of God.¹

To sum up, God as ultimate reality is the pivot of Annie Besant's metaphysics. The only way to know it completely is not through sense perception or logical reasoning or intuition but through the conquest of lower nature in man; it is only by sinking into the depths of our own being, by searching within that God can be realized.

(C) S.O.U.L

Closely related to the conception of God is the conception of soul in the philosophy of Annie Besant. Metaphysically soul is not different in essence from God

or the Absolute reality. Annie Besant means by the soul "a living, self-conscious intelligence showing forth mental attributes at will, and able to show forth attributes higher than mental as it grows, develops and asserts itself on higher planes than the physical and the astral". At another place Annie Besant defines Soul as "the intermediate state between the Spirit and the body, that which gathers experience, that which passes through the various worlds in the universe, and returns ultimately with the experience it has gathered to its primal home in God".

Soul transcends time and space and is the basis of the Unity by its multiplicity of manifestations. Annie Besant believed that there is but the One in All, in Everything; the lowest dust beneath your feet has the One within it; the highest Deva in the highest heaven is but another expression of the One.

Epistemologically, also, the basis of our belief in the existence of soul is the same as that of God. When we try to know God we at the same time have an experience of Soul. Radhakrishnan also approves this point when he says "In the spiritual experience itself, the barriers between the self and the ultimate reality drop away. In the moment of its highest insight, the self becomes aware

not only of its own existence but of the existence of
an omnipresent spirit of which it is, as it were, a focu-
sing we belong to the real and the real is mirrored in
us". 1 Annie Besant notices a transcendental consciousness
in man which is the cardinal basis of the concept of Atma
or Soul in the Hindu philosophy. Annie Besant considers
the empirical self as the reflection of the metaphysical
self.

Immortality of the Soul: According to Annie Besant
Soul is immortal and never dies, but it develops by degrees
from lower Soul to the higher soul. Soul carries on some
experiences acquired in one life to the other. Annie
Besant writes "when the Soul first passes through the
gateway of death there will be scarcely anything for it to
carry on into this higher condition, hardly any experience
which it can use for the development, as it were, of men-
tal faculty. Still, the very few experiences that it has
acquired during its first life in the body, which are not
Kamic, will be carried on". 2

The pilgrimage of Soul is very long. In order to
become a liberated Soul it has to shun all desires and
attachments with the world, then only the soul can achieve
Nirvana or liberation. Annie Besant writes about Soul
that when "stage after stage it has developed mind, where

stage after stage it has purified intellect, when it has
get rid of desires, when it has become a liberated Soul,
when it has renounced the going onward for the sake of
humanity, when it has remained within the sphere of earth
for helping man until the cycle of humanity is completed,
then entering into Nirvana, there comes the state of
All-consciousness, of Bliss".  

Annie Besant fully believes that the Soul having
worked through its pilgrimage from the lower position to
the highest, accumulating experiences, shakes off the
compound individuality and achieves its immortality,
enters God, freeing from the round of births and rebirths.
Annie Besant writes "He builds the living Egos of men....
and ultimately unites them in Himself, that is the All".  

(D) KARMA

Annie Besant was a Hindu by adoption so she accepted
all the beliefs advocated by Hinduism, she gladly accepted
the truth conveyed by the concept of Karma. The concept
of Karma stressed a constant activation of moral energy
for the attainment of perfection and is completely opposed
to the predistination of a few chosen souls as conceived
by John Calvin. The theosophy, to which Annie Besant
was very closely attached, has a special place for Karma

1. Ibid. p.53.
philosophy in its philosophical system and so Annie Besant wrote and delivered her some of the lectures on Karma philosophy.

Karma, a Sanskrit word, literally means 'action'. The main conception of Karma is 'as a man soweth, so shall he also reap'. As all actions are affects flowing from preceding causes and as each effect becomes a cause of future effects, this idea of cause and effects is an essential part of the idea of Karma. The word Karma is used for causation. "Karma is not a mechanical principle but a spiritual necessity. It is the embodiment of the mind and will of God. God is its supervisor, Karmadhyaksha".¹

Annie Besant writes that Karma is "the law of causation, the law of cause and effect".² Karma underlies all special laws, all causes and effects. It is a universal condition whereon all other laws depend. So long as any one is related to matter -- human beings, animals, vegetables -- so long is one within Karmic law. No one can go outside the Law of Karma. "The principle of Karma reckons with the material or the context in which each individual is born. While it regards the past as determined, it allows that the future is only conditioned. The spiritual element in man allows him freedom within the

¹ Radhakrishnan, S: "The Hindu View of Life", p.73.
limits of his nature. Man is not a mere mechanism of
instincts. The spirit in him can triumph over the auto-
matic forces that try to enslave him. The Bhagavad Gita
asks us to raise the self by the self. We can use the
material with which we are endowed to promote our ideals.
The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not
select them. They are traced to our past Karma”, 1 which
has an ample scope for genuine rational freedom for a man.

Working out of Karma: The study of Karma is a very com-
plicated subject therefore it would be proper to sub-
divide the subject and then study the sub-divisions one
by one in order to understand Annie Besant’s approach to
the concept of Karma.

Every man sends forth three classes of energies
in his ordinary life. These energies belong respectively
to the three worlds that a man inhabits: "mental energies
on the mental place, giving rise to the causes we call
thoughts; desire energies on the astral plane, giving rise
to these we call desires; physical energies around by
these; and working on the physical plane, giving rise to
the causes we call actions”. 2 In order to trace intelli-
gently the part played by these three classes of energies
in Karma, it would be useful to study each of these in its
workings:-

1. The Hindu View of Life, p.75.
(1) **Thoughts:** The first of these classes is composed of our thoughts. Thought is a very powerful factor in the creation of human Karma. Thoughts are the vibrations which give rise to forms of mental images, which shape and mould our mental body. Every thought modifies the mental body and the mental faculties in each successive life are made by thinkings of the previous lives. Annie Besant writes:

A man can have no thought-power, no mental ability, that he has not himself created by patiently repeated thinkings; on the other hand, no mental image that he has thus created is lost, but remains as material for faculty, and the aggregate of any group of mental images is built into a faculty which grows stronger with every additional thinking or creation of a mental image, of the same kind.\(^1\)

On the law, explained above, the man can gradually make for himself the mental character he desires to possess. In the process of working up the mental images of a man death does not bring any stoppage in the work, the man brings back this faculty with him to his next birth on the physical plane. Thus the mental images created in one life appear as mental characteristics and tendencies in another.

(ii) **Desires:** The mental images set up vibrations which produce some secondary forms, which are generally,

\(^1\) Ibid. p. 276.
being mingled with desire, take up some astral matter, Annie Besant refers to these secondary thought-forms as "astro-mental images".¹

This second great class of energies is composed of desires. These desires mould and shape after death. Annie Besant writes "when the desires are bestial, drunken, cruel, unclean, they are the fruitful causes of congenital diseases, of weak and diseased brains, giving rise to epilepsy, catalepsy and nervous diseases of all kinds, of physical malformations and deformities, and, in extreme cases, of monstrosities".²

Desires, according to Annie Besant, always attract the man towards an environment in which they may be gratified. Desires for earthly things draw a man towards the place where the objects of desire are most readily obtainable and therefore a man is born according to the desires of the past lives.

(iii) Actions: The third great class of energies, appearing on the physical plane, are known as actions, generate much Karma by their effects on others, but only slightly effect directly the Inner Man. They are effects of the past thinkings and desires of a man, and the Karma

¹. Annie Besant: 'Karma', p.25.
². The Ancient Wisdom, p.279
they represent is far the most part exhausted in their happening. When the actions are often repeated, they set up a habit of the body which determines the non-human environment of a man. Annie Besant writes that "the favourable or unfavourable nature of the physical surroundings into which we are born depends on the effects of our previous actions". ¹

The Kinds of Karma: According to Annie Besant, man has the "ripe Karma" over which man has no power of choice. This is fixed by the choice the man has made in his past, so he requires to discharge the liabilities he has contracted in his previous lives. Out of all the Karma of the past there is a certain amount which is used in the limits of a single life but there are some kinds of Karma which cannot be worked out in a single physical body, but would require other bodies, other than one, for their expression.

Annie Besant gives the following kinds of Karma:-

(1) Inevitable actions: Every action is the final expression of a series of thoughts. If persistently thoughts of the same kind are reiterated, a point of saturation is reached, if the thought is good one it will will result in good response and a bad thought in a bad response.

¹. The Ancient Wisdom, p.281.
Accumulated Karma: According to Annie Besant, the past evil thinking makes a crust of evil habits around a man which imprison him and make a evil life of him. But as the lives are a continuous process, so sometimes the soul develops noble qualities and so the crust of past evil is thrown out in one life and the soul comes forth free. The accumulated Karma which is the result of the thought forces gained in different lives, is always subject to modifications. Annie Besant firmly believes that the accumulated Karma consists of "tendencies, strong or weak, according to the thought-force that has gone to their making, and these can be further strengthened or weakened by fresh streams of thought-force sent to work with or against them".¹

Collective Karma: According to Annie Besant, man is the result of collective thoughts which are woven with desires and activities of groups. The play of Karmic forces upon each as a member of the group introduces a new factor into the Karma of the individuals. So the Karma of a group is the resultant of the interacting forces of the individual composing it, and all the individuals are carried along in the direction of that resultant.

The _Karma Marga_  
Annie Besant has a firm belief in the Karma Marga theory advocated by the Hindu philosophy. She writes "this Karma Marga leads man to plunge into action of every kind, to rush out after objects of every description, to go restlessly seeking satisfaction by way of the external universe, always trying to get more and more and more, always to accumulate more and more largely, and chiefly by increasing activity by greater energy of motion, by increased concentration of effort, by incessant action, to find the Self". \(^1\)

In Annie Besant's views man is moved to action, at first, by desire for its fruit. He merely desires to enjoy. Later on the man, treading the Path of Karma, is moved by a desire for a somewhat higher fruit and that develops in him the quality of mobility. He comes exceedingly active but the actions are performed with a desire for fruit, which may be of two kinds:—

Firstly, the desire to enjoy the result of his action, whether it may be in this world, or whether it may happen to be in another. The man's activities might work entirely for fruit, giving up a thing here that he might gain much more elsewhere. He renounces all objects of

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the senses and finds peace in the solitude of recluse life, but to his disappointment he discovers that not by running away from the objects of desire can desire itself be extinguished. For desire is not extinguished by external withdrawal from the objects of desire.

Secondly, from the freedom from desire the Karma Marga is to be trodden. Annie Besant writes, "Freedom from action will not be won by the bodily abstinence from activity. The path of action must yet be trodden before the soul may be free. The freedom is won on the path itself by learning a deeper lesson than the removal of the body from the city to the jungle.... He learns that he must act, but that the motive must be changed. He must tread the path of action, but the motive is to be new and divine in its character".¹ Here on the path of Karma the man tastes the joy of the God, there begins to flow in the man the bliss of the Self. He learns to renounce and to stand without attachment to the lower, and the higher flows in and fills his being and he knows himself as one with the Supreme.

The educational philosophy of Annie Besant has been based, to a great extent, on the doctrine of Karma. It leads her to see in the child the principles of thoughts,

¹ Ibid. p.13.
desires and actions. Annie Besant thinks that though, no doubt, a child is in the grip of Karma and all his actions are governed by it, "but by a knowledge of Karma he can change his nature......He is not in the grip of an inevitable destiny, imposed upon him from outside, he is in a world of law, full of natural forces which he can utilize to bring about the state of things which he desires".\(^1\) Annie Besant is confident that a child can change his Karmic route if he is determined to do so.

"Knowledge and will -- that is what he needs. He must realize that Karma is not a power which crushes, but a statement of conditions out of which invariable results occur".\(^2\)

Annie Besant fully believes that with the knowledge of Karma a man "can modify, change, remake on other lines the nature which is the inevitable outcome of his previous desires, thoughts and actions".\(^3\) Thus a devoted teacher can mould the life of a child to healthy channels if he has a thorough understanding of the Karma of a child.

( E ) Y O G A

Yoga, according to Annie Besant is "the science of sciences" and "the way by which a man may hasten his evo-

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2. Ibid. pp.21-22.
3. Ibid. p.
lution, expand his consciousness and rise into union with the Supreme."¹ To her Yoga was destined to give the direct training for the liberation of the soul from the wheel of births and deaths.

Annie Besant's two books on Yoga entitled "Yoga" (1893) and "An Introduction to Yoga" (1908) are her lectures which she delivered at the Theosophical Conventions. In these books her views about Yoga are explained in details.

Annie Besant finds the general teachings of Yoga in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Surtras of Patanjali. She gives two great methods of Yoga -- one related to the Self and the other to the Not-Self -- by one method a man can tread the path of knowledge by buddhi or the pure reason, and by the other the same path is tread by manas or the concrete mind. Annie Besant writes "The one is the path of the metaphysician; the other is the path of the scientist."² She considers that by the metaphysical method Self can be sought only by the Self, and by the scientific method Self is sought by the Not-Self.

While explaining the path of metaphysics, Annie Besant finds that the Self is within the man, "who tries to strip away vesture after vesture, envelope after

² Annie Besant: An Introduction to Yoga, p.88.
envelope, and by a process of rejecting them he reaches the glory of the unveiled Self.\(^1\) The metaphysician's method is always strenuous, long-sustained, patient meditation. It is essential for the man who seeks the Self by the Self to have imperious faith.

On the other hand, in the way of the scientist, Annie Besant believes that the man must use the concrete and active manas, in order to understand scientifically the universe. By a close and rigorous study of every changing form in which the Self has veiled himself, the man can find the real among the unreal, the eternal among the changing, the Self amid the diversity of forms.

To Annie Besant Yoga as a science is both a theory and a practice. Yoga is never taught, save from mind to mind, from the teacher to the taught; it is neither a matter for the platform, nor is it a matter for discussion. Annie Besant writes "Discussion has no place in true Yoga. Discussion belongs to the intellect not to the Spirit; and Yoga is a matter of the Spirit and not of the intellect".\(^2\)

According to Annie Besant there are three faculties which need thorough development for obtaining a success in Yoga. These are: (a) Strong desire, (b) Strong will, and (c) Keen and broad intelligence. These three

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1. Ibid. p.88.
capacities must be fully unfolded in order that the practice of Yoga may be possible. Annie Besant suggests "If your mind is very unsteady, if it is a butterfly mind like a child's, you must make it steady. That comes by close study and thinking. You must unfold the mind by which you are to work".1

(F) THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Annie Besant gave great importance to the problem of evil. She believed that "behind the "Mystery of Evil" there is hidden some priceless truth". Though evil pertains to imperfection but that imperfection is necessary in a universe.

Annie Besant considered evil to be a necessary part of manifestation, she wrote that "evil does not exist absolutely in and by itself, but is relative, relative in that it exists in relation between things and not in the things themselves, and also because it varies with time, with succession of events, and with the progress of the universe".3

In explaining the problem of evil Annie Besant took illustrations from the Hindu Philosophy. She writes "Evil does not exist in and by itself, as we may judge from the phenomena around us; evil, like good, lies in the

3. Ibid. p.8, 2.
relationship between one thing and another; it is relative, not absolute. What we speak of as evil in one place may be not evil in another; for evolution implies his changing character, and what is good at one stage may be evil at another.\(^1\)

Annie Besant firmly believed that the evil does not reside in the things but in the relationship between them and certain other things. Illustrating her point in some detail Annie Besant said "You may have a violently vibrating body......which would cause no pain, and the result of that active motion of the body would not be anything which you would recognize as evil......By coming into contact with the body which is violently vibrating, and by receiving the blow, what we call the sensation of pain might arise. Now pain is regarded as part of the evil of the universe; pain is regarded as one of those things which are the results of what is called evil. But as a matter of fact, pain is the result of contact between two things which separately are innocuous, and arises from the inter-relation of those things which in their separate aspects are not individually pain-producing, but only imperfect, each by itself. The coming into relation with each other, they, as it were, work against each other;

\(^1\) Ibid. p.8.
then there comes out what we regard as evil, and the nature of the result will depend upon the relation between the two.¹

Annie Besant considered that evil has an important use of its own in developing the character of a man. She finds that every virtue has its opposite evil. Truth and falsehood, humility and pride, courage and cowardice, compassion and hatred are the pairs of opposites. In explaining the use of evil Annie Besant feels that one can develop truth save by struggling against the false, save by realizing that in the world around there is falsehood on every side. While suggesting the utility of evil Annie Besant says "Useful also is evil as a scourge that drives us to good."²

So in Anni Besant's philosophy the path of evil provides a challenge so that its path may be abstained so as to reach to a virtue needed by every noble man.

¹. Ibid. pp.9-10.
². Ibid. p.24.
In Annie Besant's philosophy Dharma is not a static ideal, which may be same at all times and at all places. To her Dharma is a dynamic system of duties which changes with the evolution of society. Dharma "is not a fixed code of mechanical rules, but a living spirit which grows and moves in response to the development of society". The method of Dharma is that of experimental change. It is relative to time, place, circumstances, temperament and vocation.

Annie Besant, attached adequate importance to the Sanatana-dharma or Vaidika-dharma because this oldest of living religions, is considered by her, standing unrivalled in the depth and splendour of its philosophy. This dharma is adapted to every human need. Writing about Sanatana-dharma Annie Besant says "the more it is studied, the more does it illuminate the intellect and, satisfy the heart .....who learns something of it is laying up for himself a sure increase of happiness, a sure consolation in trouble, for the rest of his life".

To Annie Besant Dharma is not merely a set of beliefs having no necessary connection with the daily life of humanity, but it is the very principles of a healthy and

beneficent life. Therefore to know these principles and act upon them, is to be a true Aryan and to tread the sure road to happiness, individual as well as general.

Explaining Dharma in details, Annie Besant wrote "Dharma.....includes two things -- the inner nature at the point it has reached, and the law of its growth for the next stage. For every man Dharma is to be declared. The first Dharma is that of 'service'. No matter in what land the souls may be born, when they have passed through the earlier stages, their inner nature demands the discipline of service and that they should learn by service the qualities that are needed for growth into the next stage. At this stage the power of independent action is very limited. At this comparatively early stage, there is more tendency to yield to impulse from without than to show a developed judgement, choosing a particular course from within......The next stage.....the Dharma of that soul is to evolve all the qualities which are now ready for evolution, and are brought out by leading the life which the inner nature demands, i.e., by taking up some occupation which the next stage requires".¹

But the scope of Dharma is more comprehensive. It is everything to which an individual is bound. Dharma

¹ Annie Besant: Dharma, pp.37-40.
is right action. It stands for both the truth of things as well as the law of evolution. Every form of life, every group of man has its dharma, which is the law of its being, vice is opposition to it. Dharma inculcates duty not only towards those who are closely related within the family circle but also towards the inanimate constituents of the universe.¹ The system of duties relevant to social relations may be called social dharma which, according to Annie Besant, has a great significance in the social life of the society.

Annie Besant greatly emphasized the importance of philosophical and religious development of a man according to dharma as the starting point of any moral and spiritual advancement. She recommends certain stages of dharma. By treading these stages of dharma a man cannot achieve fulfillment. These stages help only to take a man, step by step, to a truthful life, gained by right actions. The important stages of dharma are 'Path of Service', 'Path of Self-sacrifice', 'Path of purity', 'Path of Truth', and 'Path of Self-devotion. All these paths imply the control of our lower nature especially the fear, anger, pride, hatred and falsehood. To achieve a success through these paths does not mean forced repression but surely a process

¹ Heimann, B: Indian and Western Philosophy, p.69.
of sublimation. For sublimating the negative instincts Annie Besant attaches great importance to performance of actions and recommends prayer, silence and service as a panacea for the religious ills of a man.

In achieving a true Dharma Annie Besant recommended a stage of teaching. She wrote "The soul must have assimilated all lower experience before he can teach. If he had not been through all those previous stages, and obtained wisdom through obedience and exertion and combat, how could he be a teacher? He has reached the stage of evolution where the natural expansion of his inner nature is to teach his more ignorant brethren. These qualities are not artificial. They are inborn qualities of nature and they show themselves wherever they exist."\(^1\) Annie Besant, being a true educationist, did not favour imposing the ideals of the teacher on the others. She had a thorough understanding of the psychological advancement in her times and believed in the individual differences of the children. She warned the teachers, when she said "Place your own ideal as high as you can set it. But do not impose your ideal upon your brother, the law of whose growth may be entirely different from yours."\(^2\)

To Annie Besant standing off on some high peak of

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1. Annie Besant: Dharma, p. 43.
2. Ibid. p. 45.
spirituality and preaching a doctrine of self-sacrifice to young children was a useless venture. She advocated plain methods in educating the young mind, she writes "In teaching the young soul, use his higher selfishness to destroy the lower.....Make your aspirations high. They are the germ of powers.....climb towards it gradually, lest we fail to reach it at all." ¹

For Annie Besant Dharma is a basis on which she proposes to build the whole conduct of life -- social, political, religious and educational.

(H) NISHKAMA BHAKTI (Disinterested devotion)

To love the Self without any interest is Nishkama Bhakti or disinterested devotion. It is one of the ways to Moksa or liberation. The other ways are Jnana or Wisdom and Karma or Action.

In her metaphysics Annie Besant gave a great importance to Nishkama Bhakti. She gets maximum support from Bhagavat-Gita where Lord Krishna says "The difficulty of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifested is greater; for the path of the Unmanifested is hard for the embibed to reach. Those verily who, renouncing all actions in Me and intent on Me, worship meditating on Me, with whole-hearted Yoga, these I speedily lift up from the ocean of
death and existence, O Partha, their minds being fixed on Me.1 This devotion which Lord Krishna described in Bhagavad-Gita, this fixing of the mind, this constant meditation, this earnest worship -- these constitute the real attributes of disinterested devotion.

Bhakti is always directed towards a Being and disinterested devotion is towards the Supreme Ishvara. Annie Besant says: "In the Hindu faith, and in other faiths as well, that the Supreme manifests Himself not only as the Lord of the universe, but also in the form of men, and that in that human form He specially arouses devotion, worship, love; presenting all the attractiveness which pleases the human heart, and the beauty which captivates the human imagination".2

While studying Annie Besant's philosophy one finds a divine human form occupies the central altar of worship and there she recognizes the Ishvara himself, the One without a second, having all human emotions within Him. Annie Besant stated "whether it be under the sacred name of

Ramchandra or Shri Krishna whether it be under the name of Christ or the name of the Buddha, you will find that humanity specially craves to worship a Being, and seeks in devotional emotion that satisfaction which no abstract conception of infinity can afford. To those who tread the Path of Bhakti this object of worship must be the goal of the Path.¹

Narada, the great sage and Bhakta, explaining the nature of Bhakti writes that Bhakti is an "extreme devotion to some one"² and the element of devotion to an individual is of its very nature. Narada gives a very clear definition of Bhakti when he says "It is surrendering all actions to God, and feeling the greatest misery in forgetting God."³ Annie Besant suggests that the spirit of the true Bhakta is "all the life surrendered to the object of devotion."⁴

Annie Besant gave some preliminary steps of Bhakti which are essential for finding God.

The first step to be followed by a devotee is to "practise freedom from desire -- his only desire must be directed to God; there must be no room for any other desire in his heart."⁵ Annie Besant suggests that the first step is not complete if a man finds it enough to fix his heart

¹. Ibid. p.47.
². Ibid. p.48. Here reference has been made of 'Narada Sutra' translated by E.T.Sturdy, p.19.
³. Ibid. p.49.
⁴. Ibid. p.49.
⁵. Ibid. p.55.
on the Supreme. She writes "That practice may lead into a life wanting in the characteristics of true Bhakti. He may find delight in his meditation, joy from contemplation, and thus may become forgetful of others and may worship for the pleasure of worshipping. But the true Bhakta does not seek to gain; he seeks to give, to give constantly, perpetually, in order that he may overcome the selfishness of human nature and eradicate the grasping tendency of the mind".¹

The second step is to "do good to others".² Annie Besant suggests that for true Bhakt, the life of a Bhakta (devotee) must be that one of constant service and continual assistance to all those who are in need. She writes "give, give, give, constantly, for giving is of the very nature of love. Love asks for nothing, save the right to spend; love asks for no return, no gratitude. It asks for no enjoyment for itself. It asks only to be allowed to love, to spread itself out in every direction, and make all happy in the embrace of the lover.....where there is no free giving there is no place for God."³

The third step in the Bhakti Marga is the company of good men.....Those who are more advanced than ourselves, those who spend some of their time in conversing on subjects

¹. Ibid. p.56.
². Ibid. p.56.
³. Ibid. p.57.
of a spiritual nature, or who sit together in silence meditating on the Object of devotion, are the persons whose company should be sought, rather than the company of the worldly and the frivolous.¹

The fourth step suggests the study of good books. Annie Besant declared that those books must be read which "stimulate devotion and set before us the noble examples of the saints and the sages of the world".²

Annie Besant was confident that after following the above mentioned stages "there comes a time, when Ishvara diligently sought, reverently worshipped, persistently followed, though yet He was not seen, reveals Himself to His worshipper, and the Supreme is seen.....Though only a glimpse of His beauty be caught, though only one gleam of that glory has come down and touched the heart of the devotee, the inner man is changed; the whole heart is revolutionised; the back is turned upon the externalities of the earth, and without effort the face is turned to God".³

In concluding the concept of disinterested devotion Annie Besant got full support from the Hindu philosophy. Her ideal devotee is Arjuna, the Pandava, and the Supreme Ishvara is Lord Krishna. When devotee sees the Supreme face to face,

¹. Ibid. p. 38.
². Ibid. p. 58.
³. Ibid. p. 60.
he attains wisdom. Then Lord Krishana no longer says that
Man shall tread the path to My Supreme abode, but he says,
"He, the wise, verily is Myself". That is the goal of the
Bhakti Marga. Annie Besant writes, "So it is with the soul
and its Lord; separated for the purposes of worship and
adoration, intended to draw out the soul and all its powers,
the perfected soul becomes one with its Lord -- one for ser-
vice, one for help, one for saving the world as He helps it.
In this communion between the lover and the beloved.....
the Bhakta becomes the Savior of the world; he is very God,
and all that God can do, he who is one with Him can also do,
in the creation and dissolution of the worlds". Here
Arjuna, the Bhakta, was not an ordinary man, but a man who,
after a number of past lives, had climbed higher and higher
towards the perfection of humanity. Arjuna had disinterested
devotion for Krishna because he was at a stage where he did
not need any fruit which may inspire him to action -- action
for duty's sake and not for the sake of fruit.

II - Annie Besant's Faith in the Ethical Concepts:

Annie Besant had a great fascination for Hindu Ethics.
Her admiration for Hindu Ethics can be seen when she stated
with full confidence that "there is no religion which has

1. The Bhagavad-Gita vii. 18 translated by Annie Besant, p.138
put forward so perfect a system of Ethics from the philosophical, the scientific, as well as the emotional, side as the great Hindu faith". ¹ Annie Besant's ethical doctrines are characterized by the same desire to harmonize all extremes which are noticed in her metaphysical concepts. She tries to show, through her writings and lectures, that the highest ethical ideal is that which satisfies the whole of human nature.

To Annie Besant ethics is a systematised science of conduct having some moral principles on which a man should act. In explaining ethics Annie Besant writes "The conduct of man has reference to his surroundings as well as to himself. We have to ascertain what is good in relation to those who form our surroundings, as well as in relation to the time and place of the actor; and we may take a wider and wider view of our surroundings, according to the knowledge we possess. We have also to ascertain what is good for ourselves and in relation to ourselves. What is good for one man may not be good for another man".²

To Annie Besant Ethical science is a relative science and not an absolute science because it is relative to the man himself and his surroundings. Its object is to bring

about peace and happiness by establishing right relations between all the human beings that belong to any community or a nation. Here Annie Besant does not limit the scope of ethics to a particular area but in her ethical system a great circle exists which goes not spreading outwards indefinitely and including larger and larger areas with in its circumference. Thus in Annie Besant's ethical system we hear about "family morality, social morality, national morality, international morality, human morality, inter-world morality". 1 Annie Besant admits that in the great circle in ethics the main purpose is to bring about happiness. To her happiness neither means the transitory pleasures of the senses nor even the more durable pleasures of the mind but it means the deep, inner, enduring bliss which is the satisfaction of the Self.

In Annie Besant's system of philosophy knowledge of different religions, especially Hinduism, provided the ultimate data upon which she built her Ethical science. Emphasizing the influence of religion on ethics she writes "Morality has only one basis, on which it is built up, as a house is built on its foundation. And just as a house will become crooked and fall, if it be built on a shaky foundation, so will any morality fall which is not built on that sound basis"2 of religion.

1. Ibid. p.276.
2. Ibid. p.279.
After explaining the ethical background of Annie Besant's thought, in brief, it would be proper to proceed now to examine her views on some of the important ethical concepts.

(A) TRUTH

Every true philosopher tries to seek after Truth in the issues of life of his time and develop a school of thought for the guidance of the others. Annie Besant is no way an exception to it and as a great philosopher of her time she is also a great seeker after Truth and once she said that she wanted no other epitaph on her tomb but

"SHE TRIED TO FOLLOW TRUTH."

This simple statement shows a two-fold key to her greatness which stamped itself upon the world and made her one of the greatest 'servers' of mankind.

Ethna Snodgrass Cook, writing on Annie Besant says "Truth was her goal, but a truth so luminous, so eternal that she could say not that she had achieved but only that she "tried" in her faithful striving". Annie Besant's trial in seeking truth reveals both the genuineness of her own humility and the glory of an all-inclusive concept of truth capable of leading forward for ever so brilliant an intellect and so courageous a pioneer.

Annie Besant had a firm belief in the motto of the Theosophical Society which reads as "There is no religion higher than Truth". Annie Besant has lived truth all her life and has dwelt on it and worked for it in the immense enhancement of her usefulness to the world and its suffering millions.

Annie Besant adopted her nom de guerre as "Ajax" for writing her articles in the newspapers and journals owned by Charles Bradlaugh, the idea of the name suggested by the famous statue of "Ajax crying for light" matched with her philosophy of truth. Annie Besant writes "The cry through the darkness for light, even though light should being destruction, was one that awoke the keenest sympathy of response from my heart:--

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

To see, to know, to understand, even though the seeing blind, though the knowledge sadden, though the understanding shatter the dearest hopes -- such has ever been the craving of the upward-striving mind in man. Some regard it as a weakness, as a folly, but I am sure that it exists most strongly in some of the noblest of our race; that from the lips of those who have done most in lifting the burden of ignorance from the over-strained and bowed shoulders of a STUMBLING world has gone out most often into the empty darkness the pleading, impassioned cry: "Give Light"
The light may come with a blinding flash, but it is light more the less, and we can see.  

Annie Besant needed also a light to fill the places of darkness and that light was Truth, which she constantly shed and which she incessantly searched throughout her life.

Ethel Snodgrass Cook writes: Truth to Annie Besant was not mere validity of fact, not coldly scientific law discovered from its effect upon humanity; but rather timeless and all-inclusive principles of life adequate to serve her fellowmen in all walks of life as well as through the ages.

Annie Besant believed in the great strength of Truth she writes: "One thing no power can do is to trample out the Truth by force, by persecution, even by death itself; for Truth is immortal, and from the ashes of one slain messenger of Truth arise hundreds of others to re-echo the message that was brought." Annie Besant affirms the reality of Absolute Truth because it is only a fond hope of man, just as appearance is perceivable in Reality, the absolute Truth is pre-supposed in relative truths. Annie Besant writes, "All truths are fundamentally one, as all forces may be combined into one universal force."

The Form of Truth:

Annie Besant suggested that people should not believe a truth which they cannot understand or live upon or act

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out in the world because without action every belief is futile. The religion of a man must be practical one, Annie Besant writes: "truth is only truth for you when you have learned to live it. And the man who has learned to live it. And the man who has learned to live one fragment of truth will find truth herself come to him with open arms; for she only gives herself to those who are willing to surrender themselves to her, and to live every truth that she imparts".¹

Annie Besant believed that the form of truth must suit our limited intelligence, it must be presented in such a form which may enable us "to assimilate those truths at our stage of understanding. It is exactly the same as in giving food to people. If you fed a baby on the food given to grown up, it would choke and die......So it is in the matter of truth. We want truth in a form that we can assimilate, so that we can grow up by it, just as the baby wants food in a form that it can assimilate; otherwise it cannot grow. If these great truths come thundering down upon us just as they are, they would crush us and we should be broken up by them. The Masters are wise, being as it were educated mothers and not ordinary mothers, and so they are careful in feeding their spiritual babes".²

¹ Annie Besant: "Mysticism", p.29.
Conditions for Seeking the Truth:

If the ultimate truth is attainable, we would like to know, what are the conditions laid down by Annie Besant which a seeker after truth must satisfy?

Firstly, a seeker must have an inquiring spirit, a deep urge to know what is real and what is not real. In the book 'The Inner Government of the World' Annie Besant writes "No man can really believe a truth, until he has grown to the extent which enables him to see it as truth for himself......The Truth in you recognizes the truth outside you, when once the inner vision is open".1 In another book, entitled "Theosophy and the Theosophical Society" Annie Besant writes "Truth is only truth when intellect can perceive it; only then it is truth to any individual man; only the conditions of knowing the truth, of seeing the truth, is to develop to the point whence that truth is visible. The moment you see it, you must believe it; until you see it, you ought not to say that you know it".2

Secondly, the seeker must learn to discriminate between the eternal and ephemeral and must not allow himself to be deluded by mere appearances.

Thirdly, the seeker after truth has to see that his

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mind is kept free from all prejudices and attachments to the fruit of action. In her book "The Ideals of Theosophy" Annie Besant writes "All that you need for the finding of truth is a pure heart, an eager intellect, a clean life. These are the conditions which must be fulfilled by all who would know the truth, the truth is Brahman, the Eternal .......By imposing a creed you may make hypocrites, but never knower of truth".¹

Fourthly, it is necessary for the seeker to acquire self-knowledge by turning the eye inward and purify his heart by practising virtues such as tranquility, self-control, charity and compassion. For a seeker after truth, writes Annie Besant "the value of effort does not lie in the immediate success, as success may be counted by you and me; that efforts, directed to noble ends, are never lost, but are an ever-accumulating force, and the future success could not work itself out correctly and perfectly if one of those efforts were lacking, if one of those struggles were not made......The right action ought always to be performed, even though inevitable failure waits to meet it".²

Lastly, the seeker must not only have a keen desire for knowledge but also have an intense yearning after liberation. Annie Besant considers it essential that a seeker after

truth must study the great fundamental truths of all reli-
gions and remain prepared to cross the threshold of con-
cious Divinity and realise the Self.

The Attainment of Truth:

In the system of Annie Besant's moral philosophy it must be understood that for the attainment of truth, which means the spiritual illumination, only intellectual discipline and moral purity are by themselves not enough. They are only the preparatory grounds and merely pave the way for the attainment of a higher ideal, the ultimate truth.

According to Annie Besant there are three possible steps in attaining the ultimate truth. These are: (a) Prayer, (b) Meditation and (c) Divine grace.

To her prayer is not of the nature of petition or adoration but of contemplation. By meditation she means a whole-hearted engagement and devotion to the work. But all knowledge and morality, prayer and meditation are useless and inadequate to lead to the ultimate truth, in Annie Besant's system of thought, unless the blessings of the Masters are not received in the form of abounding Grace.

By 'Masters' Annie Besant means those just and perfect men whom we in India call Rishis or ascetics and who, according

1. Jinarajadasa, C: an article on "Mrs. Besant's poems in the New India of 20th October 1917 gives one poem of Annie Besant on prayer, where she wrote: "In musing, strength must come to dare,
   Petitions are but empty air,
   Brave action is the only prayer,
   Thus learn to pray"
to Annie Besant's belief, have helped, guided and inspired Indian society at all times.

(B) TOLERANCE

In Annie Besant's philosophical thought the concept of tolerance has an important place. Annie Besant preached tolerance to the people because she had a belief in the One Self, and the reverent acceptance of the infinite variety of Its intellectual manifestation. In India to practise toleration is a necessity because of the complexity of religions and languages.

Annie Besant writes: "Tolerance has always been a characteristic of Hindùism, which has never sought to convert men from their own faith, nor to impose on those within its own pale any special form of intellectual belief. The variety of philosophic views embraced within its circle, as shown in the six Darsanams, testifies to the tolerance and wide-mindedness which have ever marked it."¹

According to Annie Besant the liberal and noble teachings of Hinduism shaped the thoughts of every true Aryan, so that he may never fall into the error of trying to belittle or injure any of the religions of the world. The preachings of Hinduism has made every Hindu "bound to be tolerant even with the intolerant knowing that no evil can

be destroyed save by its opposite good".¹

Thus tolerance of the religious beliefs and views, as advocated by Annie Besant, should not be misunderstood to mean toleration of an acquiescence in the active infliction of wrong by the wicked on the righteous and the innocent. Annie Besant writes: "A good man, while forgiving as far as possible wrong done to himself, should endeavour to set right -- by gentle means at first, and, if these do not succeed, then by stern ones in accordance with the law of the land -- all wrong inflicted on others".²

In building her theory of toleration Annie Besant gets full support from the Bhagavad-Gita where Lord Krishna expressly laid upon Arjuna the duty of tolerance. Annie Besant, under the influence of the Bhagavad-Gita suggests that any good action should not be mistaken "for intolersce which is only of the nature of counselling or education, even though it be the education of public opinion, or constitutional and sober endeavour to wean men from injurious ways, or a thoughtful discussion with the express object of eliciting truth".³

Annie Besant, having a firm faith in the concept of tolerance, taught it to her students of Central Hindu College.

². 'Sanatana-Dharma', p. 386.
³. Ibid. p. 386.
Benares because she was very sure that this great ideal is essential in teaching mutual respect to the youth of the country. Annie Besant was very particular and careful in inculcating the spirit of religious tolerance in her students because only with tolerance the religious peace and religious respect could be imbibed.

Annie Besant warns the Indians against religious narrowism when she says: "Do not let your ship of nationality be shipwrecked on the rocks of religious hatred and religious suspicion. Learn mutual respect. Learn that each has something to learn from the religions of the rest of mankind: from Buddhism learn that heart of love and infinite compassion which is the great characteristic of the Law of the Buddha; from Christianity learn that spirit of self-sacrifice which is the great mark of Jesus, the Christ; from Hinduism learn that note of Law, of Order, incorporate in that untranslatable word, Dharma, from Zoroastrianism learn that spotless purity of thought and word and action, which is the distinguishing mark of Zoroastrianism; from Islam learn that realisation of the Unity of God, which is the insistent message of that faith. Why quarrel? Each faith has its own characteristics.....Let each learn from all, and quarrel with none".¹

Annie Besant was very well aware that intolerance has caused more human misery than any other of the many weaknesses of humanity. She said: "It would be impossible to measure or fully to estimate the bitter prejudices that have arisen, the tears that have been shed, the hearts that have been broken, the blood that has been poured out, the starvation and hatred that have been caused by religious persecution, by religious war". ¹

Causes of Intolerance: Annie Besant gave a large number of causes which lead intolerance in the people of India. To Annie Besant, the causes are different because "the ways are different, because men's minds are different, because their hearts are different, because they have grown up along different lines of thinking, and have been accustomed in the immemorial past which lies behind each of us, which stretches backwards into the dawn of time, to a variety of religious beliefs, a variety of standpoints and of views". ²

Cure of Intolerance: Annie Besant wanted to cure intolerance growing in people. She is quite aware of the fact that intolerance breeds hatred and hatred brings forth many social ills. She suggests few methods for curing intolerance. Firstly, she recommends, to study with sympathy the controversial literature. She writes: "To study without

¹ Annie Besant: "The Ideals of Theosophy", p.69.
² Ibid. p.72.
sympathy is to see the blemishes; to study with sympathy is to see the lovelinesses. And you can never understand the beauty of a faith and its hold upon the minds of its adherents, until you study it with the eyes of love and sympathy, and feel in yourself the vibrations which it arouses in those to whom it appeals. Hence if you would be true lover of the Divine Wisdom, rise above the intolerance that would dictate to another into that liberty of the Spirit in which alone truth is found. Study what you do not agree with more than that with which you agree. Day by day familiarise yourself with the standpoints of others, rather than ever keeping your eyes fixed on an object from exactly the same spot; learn from those with whom you disagree more than from those you agree; and in that way you shall become many-sided as the many aspects of the truth itself.¹

Secondly, Annie Besant suggested to try to correct the natural intolerance of mankind by looking in every person and in every opinion for the good, rather than for the bad. She recommends "let your first impression of a book be the favourable one rather than the hostile; let the first impression of a man be of his virtues, rather than of his vices. For the better he seems to you, the more you are seeing of the Self that is trying to manifest through his mind and body."²

¹. Ibid. pp.74-75.
². Ibid. p.76.
In short Annie Besant's concept of tolerance tries to show human beings a respect and understanding of each other which will leave the mind untainted and will not allow to develop consciousness about religious differences.

(C) SELF - SACRIFICE

Annie Besant's concept of Self-sacrifice was purely a Hindu concept which she builds up from the Bhagavad-Gita. To her self-sacrifice means not pain but joy. Explaining the concept Annie Besant writes, "It is not really self-denial but it is self-expression. You only think of sacrifice as pain... because you look at it from the standpoint of the body. Look at it from the standpoint of the eternal Spirit and you will know that his joy and delight is in pouring himself out, and that it would be in self-repression that suffering would be found".1

Annie Besant had a firm belief that by making a sacrifice of the self, a true self is realized but by giving one self to others does not mean that that sacrifice will bring any suffering to the person. She says "You realize your own divinity as you pour out your life on others. But sacrifice is not pain, it is delight. And just as the intellectual enjoyment of a splendid poem, or the emotional

delight of some marvellous symphony, is a hundred times
dearer, more satisfying, and more delicious than the food
with which you support the body, so is the joy of the Spirit
that pours himself out more delightful and more joyous than
the joy of intellect and emotion. As those transcend the
body, so does the joy of the Spirit in turn transcend them;
and only when you have learned the joy of giving, when you
have found your own life grow mightier because you have
emptied yourself into the life of others, only then will
you know that the uttermost service is the most perfect
freedom and that in giving one's life to others one finds
the life eternal which is the very Self in men".1

The Law of Sacrifice: The study of the Law of sacrifice
follows on the study of the Law of Karma and the understand-
ing of the Law of Sacrifice is as necessary for the world as
the understanding of the Karma. Annie Besant writes "By
an act of Self-sacrifice the LOGOS became manifest for the
emanation of the universe, by sacrifice the universe is
maintained, and by sacrifice man reaches perfection".2
Annie Besant finds sacrifice as a central teaching of every
religion.

In explaining the law of Self-sacrifice Annie Besant
stated that law is "that all beings must live by the sacri-
fice of others, and therefore, that every being, as he

1. Ibid. pp.98-99.
becomes self-conscious, must be ready to repay his debt by the sacrifice of himself". To Annie Besant the law of self-sacrifice is not only found in the human being but it is also found among stones, vegetables and animals.

Annie Besant has written that "The stone is broken up for vegetable food; the vegetable is broken up for animal food; animals prey upon animals, and the strong devouring each other physically first, as food then in other ways. The Law of sacrifice is everywhere present in Nature, because the Lord is the Lord of Sacrifice and the first sacrifice is the Sacrifice of Himself. He is the Purusha, out of the parts of whose body the whole universe is made".  

(D) CO-OPERATION

Annie Besant was a great advocate of the concept of co-operation. She believed that in this age of political, economic and scientific struggles when neck-break competition

2. Ibid.p.119. Here reference is made of Bhagavad-Gita where Lord Krishna says (in ix, 27):

In this shloka Lord Krishna refers to self-sacrifice as he says "Whatsoever thou doest, whatsoever thou eatest, whatsoever thou offerest, whatsoever thou givest, whatsoever thou doest of austerity, O Kaunteya, do thou that as an offering unto Me".

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is ruling in its extremes, the concept of co-operation is very badly desirable. To the students of the Central Hindu College, Benaras Annie Besant taught the lesson of co-operation in place of competition. She firmly thinks that there cannot be a co-operative civilization without co-operators, she says "You cannot have co-operators without the development of the individual".¹

Annie Besant suggested that "you must have wise, powerful, energetic and strong-willed men in order to have able and effective co-operators, fit to direct the business of the Nation........Hence you must have individualism first and co-operation second. Now in the midst of the present individualistic civilization, you have the spirit of self-sacrifice growing up........where competition has gone to madness",² and where only the spirit of co-operation can solve the problems of civilization.

Annie Besant had a great regard and admiration for all movements of co-operative nature, actively engaged in educational, social, political and religious fields. But she has also a hatred for all non-co-operative movements working in India. She considered Gandhiji's non-co-operation Movement as "a most dangerous obstacle to India's progress",³ so far as it badly ruined the education of the Indian youth of that time.

². Ibid. p.100.
Annie Besant gave a very important place to the concept of co-operation in her educational and philosophical system when she expressed that if the spirit of co-operation is realized "then you come to a new conception. You imagine the building of a social system, in which every man who is born into it shall have the opportunity of developing every faculty he brings with him into the world. A social system wherein from every member of the society there shall be demanded social service according to his capacity, and to every member shall be given social helping according to his needs". Thus by a co-operative spirit the life of society can be moulded to better ends.